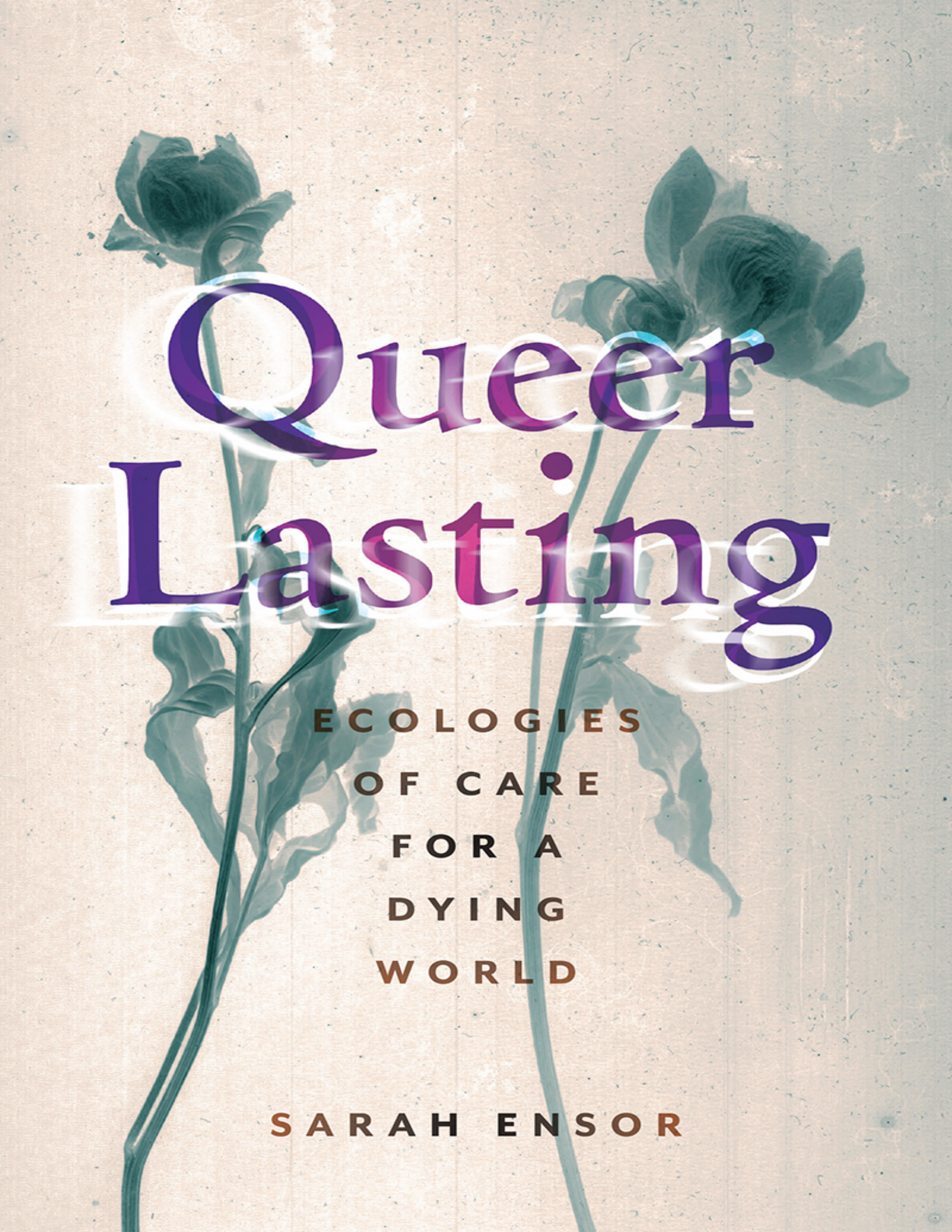
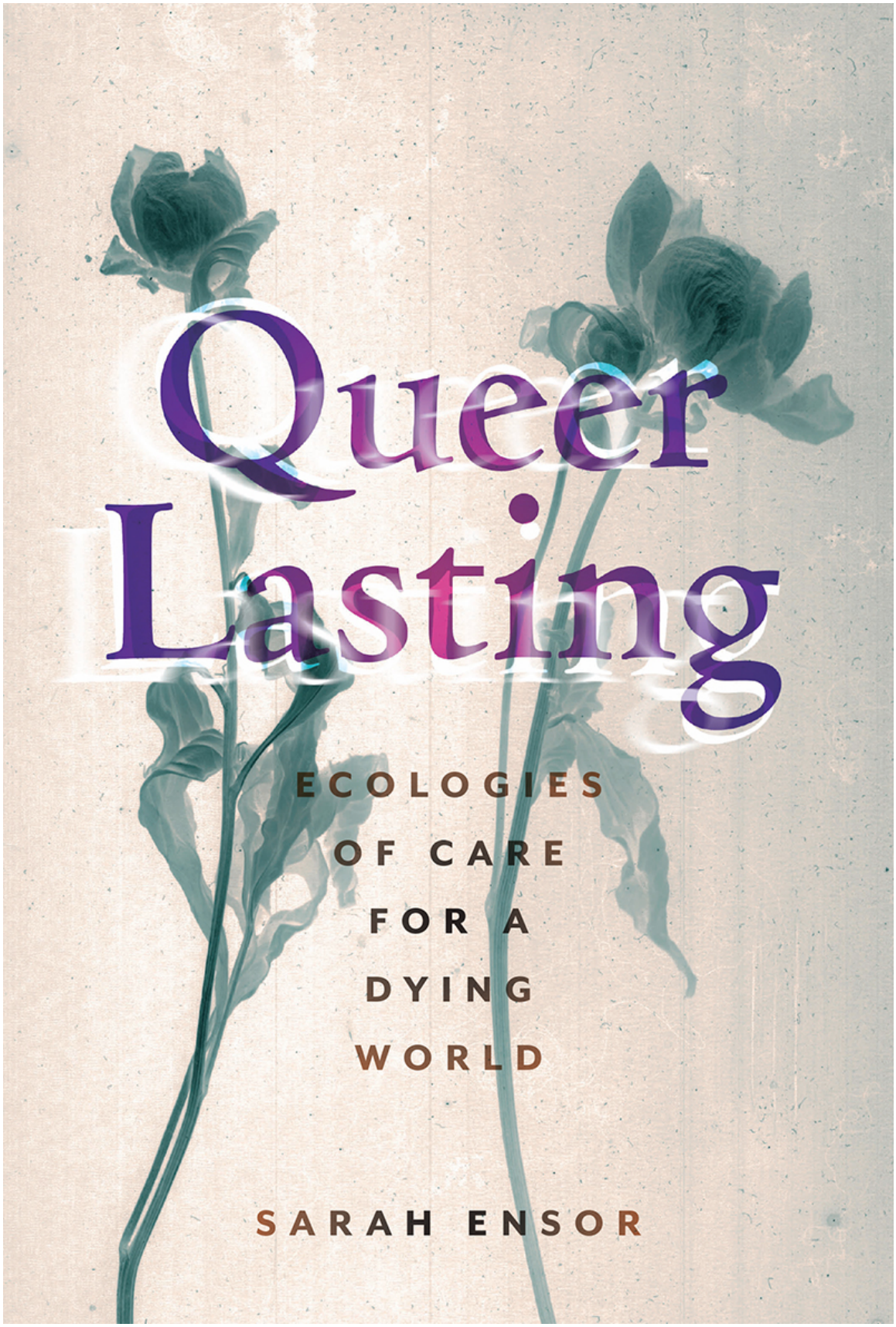

Queer
Lasting
ECOLOGIES
OF CARE
FOR A
DYING
WORLD
SARAH ENSOR


Queer
Lasting
ECOLOGIES
OF CARE
FOR A
DYING
WORLD
SARAH ENSOR

Queer Lasting

Sexual Cultures

General Editors: Ann Pellegrini, Tavia Nyong'o, and Joshua Chambers-Letson

Founding Editors: José Esteban Muñoz and Ann Pellegrini

Titles in the series include:

Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations
Phillip Brian Harper

In Your Face: 9 Sexual Studies
Mandy Merck

Murdering Masculinities: Fantasies of Gender and Violence in the American Crime Novel
Gregory Forter

Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America
José A. Quiroga

Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and the National Interest
Edited by Lauren Berlant and Lisa A. Duggan

Black Gay Man: Essays
Robert F. Reid-Pharr

Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion
Edited by Maria C. Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg

The Explanation For Everything: Essays on Sexual Subjectivity
Paul Morrison

The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater
Edited by Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla

Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism
Edited by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV

Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces

Juana María Rodríguez
Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance
Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini
Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture
Frances Negrón-Muntaner
Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era
Marlon B. Ross
In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives
J. Jack Halberstam
Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality
Dwight A. McBride
God Hates Fags: The Rhetorics of Religious Violence
Michael Cobb
Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual
Robert F. Reid-Pharr
The Latino Body: Crisis Identities in American Literary and Cultural Memory
Lázaro Lima
Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America
Dana Luciano
Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism
Scott Herring
Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination
Darieck Scott
Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries
Karen Tongson
Beyond the Nation: Diasporic Filipino Literature and Queer Reading
Martin Joseph Ponce
Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled
Michael Cobb

Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias
Eng-Beng Lim
Transforming Citizenships: Transgender Articulations of the Law
Isaac West
The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism within US Slave Culture
Vincent Woodard, Edited by Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride
Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings
Juana María Rodríguez
Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism
Amber Jamilla Musser
The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies
Rachel C. Lee
Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men
Jane Ward
A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire
Hiram Pérez
Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance
Uri McMillan
The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography
Ariane Cruz
Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique
Robert F. Reid-Pharr
Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left: A History of the Impossible
Malik Gaines
A Body, Undone: Living On After Great Pain
Christina Crosby
Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality
Katherine Franke

The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia
Gayle Salamon
Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody
Melissa M. Wilcox
After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life
Joshua Chambers-Letson
Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance
Amber Jamilla Musser
Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life
Tavia Nyong'o
Queer Times, Black Futures
Kara Keeling
Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity
José Esteban Muñoz
Times Square Red, Times Square Blue
Samuel R. Delany
Queer Faith: Reading Promiscuity and Race in the Secular Love Tradition
Melissa E. Sanchez
Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora
Keguro Macharia
Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicanx Avant-Garde
Robb Hernández
Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World
Zakiyyah Iman Jackson
Keeping It Unreal: Black Queer Fantasy and Superhero Comics
Darieck Scott
The Tragedy of Heterosexuality
Jane Ward
Sexuality Beyond Consent: Risk, Race, Traumatophilia
Avgi Saketopoulou

The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics
Janet R. Jakobsen
Queer Childhoods: Institutional Futures of Indigeneity, Race, and Disability
Mary Zaborskis
Bottoms Up: Queer Mexicanness and Latinx Performance
Xiomara Verenice Cervantes-Gomez
Deviant Matter: Ferment, Intoxicants, Jelly, Rot
Kyla Wazana Tompkins
Queer Lasting: Ecologies of Care for a Dying World
Sarah Ensor

Queer Lasting

Ecologies of Care for a Dying World

Sarah Ensor

New York University Press
New York

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York
www.nyupress.org

© 2025 by New York University
All rights reserved

Please contact the Library of Congress for Cataloging-in-Publication data.

ISBN: 9781479829446 (hardback)
ISBN: 9781479829477 (paperback)
ISBN: 9 9781479829507 (library ebook)
ISBN: 9781479829491 (consumer ebook)

This book is printed on acid-free paper, and its binding materials are chosen for strength and durability. We strive to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials to the greatest extent possible in publishing our books.

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Also available as an ebook

For Ingrid,

at last

“yes, I was thinking
we live without a future : :
that’s what’s queer : : & now”

—Brian Teare, “Toxics Release Inventory (Essay on Man)” (2019)

Contents

Preface: Learning How to Last

Introduction: Queer Lasting
1. Terminal Regions: Queer Ecocriticism at Life's End
2. Grammars of the Unrealized: Lost Causes and Subjunctive Possibilities in Willa Cather
3. Queer Unliving: Species of Extinction in the Literature of HIV/AIDS
4. Cruising the Planet: The Sexual Ecology of Samuel Delany
5. Persistent Decay: Queer Half-Lives and the Poetics of Fallout

Epilogue: The Gays and the Grays

Acknowledgments
Notes
Index
About the Author

Preface

Learning How to Last

Late in the afternoon of May 30, 1948, in the wake of an unusually snowy winter and an unusually rainy spring, a railroad dike broke along the northwest edge of Vanport, a military public housing project on reclaimed lowlands in the Columbia River adjacent to Portland, Oregon. Vanport—at one point the state's second-largest city, with a population numbering over 40,000—was an avowedly provisional community, built hastily in 1942 to house an influx of workers who moved to the Pacific Northwest to work in three wartime shipyards owned by the Kaiser Shipbuilding Company. By 1948, the war was over, the shipyards had closed, and the physical plant of Vanport was "decaying" and "deteriorating," though 18,500 residents remained.[1] On the morning of May 30, after a series of floods upstream, the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) papered the town with flyers assuring the community that there was no need to evacuate.[2] That afternoon, ten minutes after the first dike burst, Vanport was inundated with the rising waters of the Columbia, its literally foundationless structures never to be rebuilt.

Among the lives feared lost that day was that of the fledgling Vanport Extension Center (sometimes known as Vanport College), a school for veterans that later became Portland State University, the institution where I taught from 2012–2017. "[N]o modern American university," it has been said, "began in less promising circumstances than Portland State,"[3] its origins proving coextensive with the threat of its extinction. In part because of the Vanport flood, and in part because of the forms of precarity that the institution endured before and since, Portland State semi-officially has been deemed "the college that would not die." But I prefer the somewhat more casual moniker that the Vanport-era students gave the school: "The college without a future."[4]

The college without a future has persisted for seventy-eight years and counting, becoming—like the queer texts that animate this project—a model for how the futureless last.[5] While PSU is, today, an incredibly vibrant place to teach and learn, it remains, especially when compared to its more traditional institutional counterparts, quite disinterested in futures—whether by that word we mean capital campaigns, a model of education as a project of self-realization or a return on investment, or an understanding of its students as future alumni and hence as future donors. There are complex reasons for this, and to elaborate the factors involved is beyond the scope of this project. For now, let me simply say that at a university where the course of institutional and student development has rarely been linear,[6] the focus is more often on what *is* than on what *will be*, on the horizontal and diagonal relations athwart the present rather than on the question of what that present will become. The work of caring, of teaching, of tending, and of persisting is consequently transformed. At PSU, I learned how community can emerge in the absence of futurity, what it means for things to last in nonnormative and non-futural ways, and how it feels to find pockets of possibility stitched onto the back side of the present. To relinquish the future, in other words, is not to give up on persistence or care or political action, but instead to reorient our understanding of them.

Such lessons become even more concrete when we read the contemporary Portland State in conversation with its earliest incarnation. For, in a manner reminiscent of queer life as I engage it in this project, Vanport's faculty, staff, and students responded to the acute threat of futurelessness that the floodwaters brought with an ethic honed amidst the forms of futurelessness that constituted daily life at an "evanescent institution" housed in a fundamentally "transitory place."[7] Given that, even before the flood, classes were often held in "makeshift classrooms" erected and dismantled daily, it may be no surprise that life went on for Vanport College when little more remained of the physical campus than a few microscopes, a book truck, and three library books plucked from the water.[8] And it may likewise be no surprise that an institution whose earliest community members sounded the figurative alarm and rescued their neighbors when both the literal sirens and city institutions failed them[9] has responded to contemporary state divestment with collectivizing forms of solidarity rather than gestures of privatization. From its inception, PSU's

continuance has been predicated on, not simply endangered by, the ongoing experience of living without a future.

As is likely already becoming clear, PSU is—to borrow a line from Matt Brim—"the queerest school I know" (3), in part because it both troubles and offers extant alternatives to the presumptions that animate many discussions of higher education. The discourse surrounding the compounding threats confronting colleges and universities today—whether it expresses the resulting danger in a lexicon of "the end," "extinction," "dying," or "apocalypse"[10]—often assumes a foundation of normative vitality whose futurity, under threat, needs to be shored up (or "reimagined") in turn. But the college that would not die, emerging as it did from the foundationless structures of Vanport, has not died in part because it has never lived on the terms that define better-resourced institutions' sense of their own viability. Rather, like the queer communities that I engage in this project, PSU's existence—from Vanport to the present—has been intimately interwoven with endings and extinction, a fact that fundamentally shapes how it carries on.[11] Indeed, when I arrived at PSU I found a community where the entire faculty was unionized; where brilliant students practiced brilliantly inventive forms of mutual aid;[12] where time (syllabi, quarters, years), precisely by virtue of being untethered from the future, constellated into unpredicted shapes; where accidental, transient kinships flourished;[13] where days were spent doing the (often exhilarating, sometimes dispiriting, always inspiring) work of collectively making a world.[14] It was my students and colleagues there, more than any text I've read or course I've taken, who taught me what it means for queer work to live, and for queer community to last.

I give PSU the first words of this book, then, not only because it is the place where I began to write it, but also, and more importantly, because it is there that I learned to enact the forms of care, continuance, and collective endeavor that the following pages limn. I arrived in Portland a queer ecocritic committed to finding ways to reimagine futurity outside of reproductive logics. And yet the more time I spent in those classrooms, the less of a pull the future exerted, and the less necessary it came to seem to collective action or communal flourishing. Inspired by such lessening, *Queer Lasting* develops a model of environmental care—and a practice of ecocritical reading—that relinquishes its investment in the future. More

specifically, by juxtaposing literatures from two periods of queer extinction, I trace the forms and practices of lasting that emerge amidst, and are predicated on, the experience of living at the end—or, in the parlance of late-nineteenth-century American fiction, "at the last."[15] In a critical moment when not only environmental thought but also much liberatory scholarship understands our collective task to involve imagining—and bringing about—new futures, I consider what becomes possible when we take our eye off that nominal prize, allowing other grammars of possibility to emerge as a result. As I engage the specific ways that literary texts, readerly practices, and historical potentialities we nominally have left behind have managed to last, I try to honor a place that, long after I left it, has never left me.[16]

Introduction

Queer Lasting

Early in Molly Lynch's 2023 novel *The Forbidden Territory of a Terrifying Woman*, the protagonist Ada—who later becomes one of a series of mothers to disappear unknowingly from her own life—imagines how she might have articulated to another writer the feeling of being a parent amidst a fragile present: "She would've said, Have you noticed how you can't see the future and that makes it so hard. I mean to be here, on the earth, in any form."[1] As she goes on to reflect, the future's illegibility leaves her feeling "intimidated by the role of mother, not to mention the act, raising a child so late in the world. It felt so late" (22). The belatedness of Ada's world is made evident throughout the book not only in waves of environmental catastrophe, but also in the obsolescence of the tools that long have enabled environmentalists to think futurally. For Ada can see nothing as clearly as she sees Gilles, her son. But, unlike generations of environmentally-minded parents before her, she cannot, in his figure, see the future. It is too late in the world for that. Amidst "the soil that's doing all this shifting, the ground that's not promising anything anymore" (21), the child-as-future trope has, itself, finally run aground.[2]

Ada's predicament is hardly exceptional, even as Lynch depicts and responds to it with what Claudia Dey has deemed "a radical new mythology for our time."[3] For the feeling of a receding future—and the sudden inoperativity of many cultural imaginaries—pervades not only the daily news but also conversations across the humanities, surely because it is becoming harder for even the most privileged individuals and institutions to ignore the cascading socioenvironmental crises that seem to imperil continuance as such. In the spring of 2022, for instance, Arielle Zibrak (@zarielle) lamented on Twitter: "I just noticed the future as a concept is gone. Totally. This is the semester where its failure to motivate became complete, where 'what next?' has become an outdated question for most

everyone" (April 18, 2022). While Zibrak wrote from her perspective as an English professor, Twitter user @daniellecanyell echoed the sentiments from a student's point of view: "I don't think older adults realize how outright depressing it is for millennials and gen z to keep 'investing in our future' when everything is headed towards a future that doesn't seem even remotely bearable" (June 23, 2022). The same summer, in *Rehearsals for Living*, her epistolary collaboration with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Robyn Maynard articulated the experience of living "in a time when any notion of *future* feels unnavigable."[4]

As these brief examples already begin to suggest, as confidence in futurity wanes, the future also begins to appear everywhere, both under the sign of its possible erasure and in the collective response to that threat. For when the future as some of us (thought we) knew it is gone, receding, collapsing, or, in Gerry Canavan's words, has "gone bad," the critical consensus suggests that our task is, in turn, to imagine or speculate "new one[s]," pluralized and creatively remodified.[5] As "futures" proliferate across our protest signs and our research initiatives, our book titles and our event series, it seems that we implicitly have agreed to remedy the future's receding viability by rendering it the gravitational center of critical and activist work.[6] In the process, contemporary thought increasingly assumes the shape of environmental thought—not only because the forms of precarity to which it frequently attends are inextricable from the differential, and differentially intensifying, harms of climate catastrophe, but also, and for my purposes more importantly, because these varied projects generalize a conceptual structure that, as Susie O'Brien and Cheryl Lousley have demonstrated, long has been the specific province of environmental politics: concern with *the future of the future* itself.[7]

"Futures," in other words, is the keyword of our present, the lexicon in which scholars and activists across fields both acknowledge the many intersecting crises confronting (surrounding, constituting) us and imagine their response. Multiply metonymic, it simultaneously indexes that futurity is imperiled and promises that futurity will exist. The animating logic of these compound "futures" thus proves bidirectional: for instance, imagining "trans futures" is, on the one hand, a way of insisting that transness will persist, that there will be trans people in the future and that there will be a future for trans people.[8] And yet to imagine "trans futures" is also to

imagine the future—and futurity—otherwise,[9] and hence to promote the continuance of a temporal realm that increasingly feels imperiled. Where "futures" grants trans life the possibility of persisting, trans life also offers futurity itself a way to go on.

Such plural "futures" intervene in a "chronopolitical terrain" where, in Kodwo Eshun's words, "power . . . functions through the envisioning, management, and delivery of reliable futures," while access to futurity is unevenly distributed across racial, gender, and class lines.[10] Indeed, when Lou Cornum powerfully articulates that "[f]uturity is a terrain of struggle with many fronts but one enemy, the singularity of the future as put forth by a capitalist model of the world" (169), it seems important to make explicit what, in this account, remains somewhat implicit: that the naturalized capitalist (settler, straight[11]) future—"the future," singular and unmodified—endangers not only minoritized communities but also, ironically, futurity itself. It is clear, consequently, why "futures" as a hermeneutic has become the tool for doing battle on chronopolitical terrain, and for securing the possibility of survival and collective thriving on an increasingly damaged planet. In the face of a futurity imperiled not only by capitalism, racism, and settler colonialism (and the climate catastrophe they together have wrought), but also by the vision of "the future" they share, it seems only natural that "otherwise futures" and "alternative futuring"[12] have become the privileged way of refusing such foreclosures and opening the aperture of possibility anew. Whether *Old*, *Migrant*, *Black*, *Uneven*, Trans, Feminist, or Queer (Futures),[13] Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, or Afro- (Futurisms),[14] the resulting projects illuminate our critical environment with the force of their speculative imaginaries.

But what has this emphasis on the future(s) rendered unthinkable? What forms of caring, collectivizing, and continuing has it cast into shadow, both within these contemporary projects and within the longstanding structure of environmental(ist) thought that they adopt? What grammars of living and lasting has it obscured? I pose such questions not to diminish the powerful work of these futural imaginaries, but rather to ask after potentials that their implicit forms of consensus—grammatical, generic, epistemological, and otherwise—have made difficult to imagine. For as they powerfully unravel the "autonaturalizing"[15] force of the singular future, these projects necessarily naturalize certain habits of attention and critical tendencies in

turn.[16] With this fact in mind, let me return to the texts with which I began, and invite them now to pose a different set of questions, and index a different set of possibilities. What might happen if we stopped investing in the future, or, following Zibrak, *let* the future as a concept be gone?

This line of inquiry may seem fundamentally untimely: why choose a moment when the future is imperiled across so many fronts, for so many communities, to relinquish our commitment to it? But I pose such questions precisely so as to heed how they already have been answered via the practices of queer life, by those who have responded to their experience of a terminal present with *affirmative disinterest* in the notion of the future, setting their sights elsewhere and directing their energies otherwise. Inspired by such a legacy, *Queer Lasting* offers an alternative to the insistently futural posture of both environmental thought and ecocritical reading, considering what becomes possible when we stop relying on the future—or on "futures"—to motivate our practices of care, continuance, and collective action. In the process, it develops a queer ecocritical method predicated on the immanent ethical possibilities of the present.

More specifically, in the chapters that follow, I trace the queer forms of lasting embodied and practiced by those who find themselves, in the parlance of American regionalist writer Sarah Orne Jewett, "at the last"[17]: at the end of life, at the end of a family line, as the last living member of a species, at the end of a fleeting encounter or temporary intimacy, perhaps at the end of the future itself. In queer culture, I argue, these two paradigms—persisting and being at the end—often prove inextricable from one another. Queer lasting thus names a form of ongoingness—and a practice of togetherness—predicated upon vulnerability and impermanence. To put this another way: lasting is a term for all that queers have made possible for themselves and for others when it has been "late in the world." The queer work of "liv[ing] without a future" is therefore not a matter of resignation;[18] rather, it involves finding ways to go on together within a precarious present, and to enable the present to continue and change shape in turn.

Especially when compared to the power, familiarity, and monumentality of "the future," lasting is a minor (and easily overlooked) phenomenon,[19] in part because its status as gerund, rather than simple noun, makes it somewhat less readily legible, and somewhat more difficult to grasp. But that is precisely the point. Throughout the book, I consider the creative

grammars that emerge within literatures of queer futurelessness, rendering thinkable shapes of action and possibility too readily cast into shadow by the nominal "future" (the future as noun) and its attendant critical gestures.[20] In the process, I demonstrate how queer formalist reading—a practice that takes seriously the intrinsic affordances of language; that lingers with texts and practices that seem backward, untimely, or otherwise retrograde; that attunes us to all that the present *still* and *already* is—can enable ecocriticism to differently inhabit the transformative power of queer life and thought alike. I thus demonstrate how belatedness—the experience of arriving late or being behind the curve—can ground, rather than threaten or undo, the ethical and hermeneutic practices of queer ecologies.

My project's interest in how the futureless last also emerges from its archive. Across these chapters, I juxtapose two periods—the (long) 1890s and the (long) 1980s—when the queer community (as we now call it) found itself confronting "extinction events": the birth of the homosexual as "a species," which, as Peter Coviello and others have demonstrated, extinguished many extant forms of erotic affiliation, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, whose terrifying spread threatened the total loss of not only gay lives but also specific erotic ways of life. In the process, I trace unexpected formal, structural, and thematic homologies between two bodies of work that I deem queer literatures of extinction: AIDS literature and American literary regionalism, a "minor" late-nineteenth-century genre that, due in part to its attention to the lives of elderly characters in fading towns, has been deemed "terminal" and "futureless" since its inception. Rather than acquiescing to critics who find in regionalist fiction only versions of decay and who claim that the genre itself can "have no heirs,"[21] I heed both the forms of liveliness within the declining communities at regionalism's heart and the unexpected persistence of the genre in, and as, AIDS writing. In so doing, I offer an alternative genealogy of queer literature while also insisting upon the renewed relevance of a literary mode known for being always already residual or obsolete. In gently shifting critical focus away from speculative futurism, and instead reading realist literatures composed within the many dilated endings of queer extinction, I engage texts seemingly too backward and minor and muted to find a place among the strong transitive valence of speculative worldmaking practices.[22]

Let me be very clear: in advocating that we set our (critical, ethical, and political) gaze somewhere other than the future, I am not giving in to the despair or nihilism that can all too easily overwhelm the present. Rather, I am bringing to the environmental conversation paradigms of worldmaking that emerge precisely under circumstances where the possibility of reaching the future is off the table. And I am, in the process, seeking to disentangle—to unloose—environmental thought (including its queer varieties) from the future as it has come to be codified, reified, and defined. For being bound to (and for) the future has tended to overdetermine the form of environmental activism and thought, tethering them to particular icons, affects, models of efficacy, temporal paradigms, and habits of interpretation. In these pages, by contrast, I seek not only to excavate the subtle shades and shapes of queer lasting from the shadow of the future(s), but also to expand the forms of action that our present environmental circumstances might occasion, and the literary genres and readerly practices that can inspire such a pursuit. As they dwell within the polyvalent experience of queer futurelessness, formalizing the ethical and epistemic possibilities that emerge in the process, the texts in my archive may do nothing less than teach us how to live—and how to last—amidst life's terminal regions, amidst the many endings of the world.

Environmentalism, Queer Theory, and the Question of Futurity

So let us turn now to one of those terminal regions. In January of 1862, Harrison Otis Gray Blake sat beside his friend Henry David Thoreau and asked the dying man how the future seemed to him. "Just as uninteresting as ever," came the reply.[23] Although this wry response may be quintessentially Thoreauvian, it nevertheless remains disorienting to hear one of the central figures of mainstream American environmental thought proclaim indifference about what is to come. For if there is one trait common to environmental stewardship across its many incarnations, it is its orientation toward and investment in the future; while all political projects are predicated on a notion of futurity, environmentalism remains unique, as we already have seen, in privileging the future of the future itself. This redoubled emphasis has made the link between environmentality and

futurity seem so obvious as to not warrant comment, and so inevitable (or, dare I say, natural) as to render alternatives unimaginable.

Contributing to this sense of tautology is the historical co-emergence of environmental awareness and the concern about that environment's future, which makes their imbrication seem originary. O'Brien and Lousley point out that "[t]hough we can trace long and independent histories of the future and the environment as concepts, the emergence of each is significantly conditioned by its entanglement with the other"; they identify the 1940s and 1950s as a key period in which "'the idea of "the environment," and the crisis about its future, emerged together'" (2).[24] Not simply, then, did the notion of the environment emerge concomitantly with awareness of environmental futurity, but, more specifically, the notion of the environment emerged concomitantly with the realization that its future was *at risk*. The future, that is to say, may be environmentalism's *ur*-endangered species. Stewarding the environment thus often has come to involve saving the imperiled planet by safeguarding its (and our) future; insists David Wallace-Wells in a recent interview, "we have brought the planet to the brink of real catastrophe [. . .] and now we have about the length of a single lifetime to *save our future*."[25] Likewise, discussing the experience of coming of age amidst the foreclosures of global climate change, Daniel Sherrell reflects that "[i]ncreasingly, the only viable future seems to be shoring up the future itself."[26]

This seemingly necessary attachment to futurity determines not only the objects but also the practices of environmental attention, privileging (as do the projects with which I opened this introduction) speculative epistemological, aesthetic, and critical modes. Turning to the scientific roots of contemporary environmentalism in their argument about "science factional" works and "ecological futures," Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman observe that "[e]cological thinking [often] remains inseparable from some form of thinking about the future; ecology in general has become so closely linked to narratives of the future that even to draw attention to this link between environment and what-is-yet-to-come can seem beside the point or even tautological."[27] Similarly, Rebecca Evans has demonstrated that "[e]nvironmentalism has an intimate relationship to extrapolation; the basic project of sustainability requires at least an imaginative extension into the future one hopes to sustain."[28] Lisa Garforth, meanwhile, argues that,

precisely insofar as science fiction made environmental crisis thinkable, the genre is necessary to the process of finding our way through and beyond it.[29] Throughout these accounts, the doubly-futural speculative (or extrapolative) narrative—the futural form of a futural mode—maps onto the doubly-futural environmentalism, the creative and epistemological genre embodying the temporal emphases of the ecopolitical practice.

Although we could turn to any number of contemporary sites to demonstrate the hold of futurity—ranging from the "future generations" foundational to sustainability practices (which seek a future understood as an extension of the present) to those plural "futures" of recent liberatory scholarship (which seek futures that break radically from an unjust present,[30] and which have done tremendous work to denaturalize, pluralize, and transform the singular "future" of mainstream environmental thought[31]) —perhaps the most telling example is the continued centrality of futurism(s) within queer ecocriticism. While queer modes of inquiry are characterized by an insistence upon non-inevitability—on an ability to disaggregate phenomena (say, biology, gender, and sexuality) that have come to seem originarily or naturally yoked—the tight binding of ecology and futurity has proven difficult, if not impossible, to unravel. As a result, the necessity of thinking futurally has served as a limit to practices of queering, even as queer modes of inquiry have come to (re)shape virtually every other domain of thought in the environmental humanities. We see such a paradigm at work in Nicole Seymour's foundational book *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*, one of the first monographs in the field of queer ecocriticism: "I have shown how the queer theoretical concept of self-shattering, once limited to a sexual framework, can be put to use in environmental ethics—but I have rejected queer theory's anti-futurity, demonstrating that future-thinking is crucial to queer ecological thought."[32] For Seymour, then, "a concept of queer time that is attuned to environmentalism's focus on futurity . . . is one place [for the project of queer ecology] to start" (18–19). Such a commitment continues to animate work across the field, from Dianne Chisholm's interest in "the ecological future of queer desire" to Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff's attention to fire's "'queer' reproductive logic that . . . models genealogies that are both exuberant and future-orientated" to Catriona Sandilands's desire for "a more profoundly critical ecology, one in which the future is clearly an ecologically necessary consideration but its

imagination is not exhausted by the hegemonic forms of sociality of the present."[33] Indeed, queer ecological scholarship—across its many shapes and inflections—has come to seem synonymous with the imagining of queer ecological futurity, whether this identification takes the form of Sabine LeBel's account of "the emergence of queer ecology and queer ecological futurity" or Julia Bryan-Wilson's desire, sparked by queer artists' engagement with nuclear fallout, to "reinvent a temporality, *that is to say a futurity*, that is not reliant on paranoid fantasies of survival at all costs."[34] Amidst the unruly vectors of desire that traverse and constitute queer ecocriticism, perhaps the one stable locus of orientation is the future itself.

While this critical consensus is convincing, even logically self-evident, it also risks evacuating some of the most profound and hard-won and ethically transformative insights of queer existence, those borne precisely of queerness's constitutive intimacy with futurelessness. What of the fact, for instance, that queer life, like queer theory, teaches us that longevity need not be the measure of meaningful relation, or of ethical engagement? What of the way in which queer writers have helped us see the powerful, unpredictable, residual effects of temporary encounters or provisional practices? What of the oft-improvisational nature of queer worldmaking, which has emerged at least in part due to the absence of scripts—codified futural narratives—for living queerly? What of queer thinkers' attention to the capacious dimensionality and distension of the present, whether in the term *queer*'s own "continuing moment, movement, motive" "*across*" and "transverse" and "*athwart*," or in the "diagonal lines" of the "social fabric" that Foucault's queer friend(ship), with its "slantwise" positioning, brings to light?[35] What of the way that trans thinkers and activists have taught us to think the work of self-fashioning without teleology, or to navigate what Hil Malatino deems "future fatigue"?[36] What of the way that queer scholars have helped us to reimagine nominally futural phenomena—from optimism to survival[37]—as unfurling instead athwart a complex present? What of all the ways that queers have found to live and commune and persist, to act up and agitate, to imagine and create, to read and to write, without the promise of a future? What of all that becomes possible—all that can be *made possible*—in the absence of futurity?

For the brilliance of queer culture may be precisely this: that, in the absence of normative and reproductive futures, it has found so many ways

to last. Queerness (as a posture, as a practice, as a political and hermeneutic project) long has been intimate with futurelessness, a fact that inheres in both individual lives/desires and the commitments of queer theory as a field. As for the former: what defines queerness as an (anti-)identity category is at least in part its non-reproductive eroticism—its practices of intimate relationality, and worldmaking, that do not (seek to) guarantee the intergenerational continuance either of biological life or of the future as we know it.[38] Whereas historical and ongoing violences have foisted futurelessness of various forms onto minoritized communities—including, of course, the queer community itself—queer culture is unique in having *constituted itself* via its askance relationship to questions of futurity.[39] As the chapters that follow examine in more detail, in queer culture, futurelessness, far from being a simple foreclosure, also has been a ground of existence and ethical possibility.

Furthermore (or meanwhile), queer theory as a codified field emerged amidst, and often in response to, a specific, acute threat of futurelessness: the AIDS crisis as lived in the United States. The birth of queer theory as a field of study—and the emergence of a self-reflexive method of queer reading—thus intersects with the threat of total gay death, a paradigm that echoes the fact that, nearly a century earlier, the birth of the homosexual "as a species" brought with it the extinguishing of myriad forms of queer erotic life. We might find a succinct rendering of the resulting paradox—the queer intertwinement of birth/life/emergence and death/extinction/loss—in two characterizations of the field that manage to seem both mutually exclusive and simultaneously true: Alexis Lothian's claim that "the history of queer scholarship is a history of futures" and Neel Ahuja's equally convincing claim that "queer theory has always been a theory of extinctions."[40] If this juxtaposition suggests—as I will discuss explicitly in my third chapter—that queer extinction may in fact be a paradoxically generative process, then it also grounds a third synthetic account of the field: that *queer theory is the study of how the futureless last*.

My attention to queer culture's multiply askance relationship to futurity begins to index how this book differs from other recent critical engagements with the lived realities of futurelessness, thus clarifying the specificity of "queer lasting" as a temporal and ethical paradigm. To take two notable examples: the current discussion, like Jessica Hurley's 2020

book *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex*, treats "futurelessness as a starting point for thought rather than its end," and, like Rebecca Oh's ongoing work on "apocalyptic realism," considers how futurelessness is "never totalizing but instead prompt[s] new forms of minor worldmaking and temporalization," including "minor forms of agency, relationality, and community building."[41] However, while Hurley and Oh consider the worldmaking practices and (partial, piecemeal) forms of resistance that emerge amidst "conditions of imposed futurelessness" (Hurley 18), or by those "consigned to futurelessness" (Oh 975), my project understands futurelessness in queer life to be both imposed and intrinsic, both catastrophic and catalytic. Thus, unlike in the genre that Oh deems apocalyptic realism, the relationship in my archive between "modes of acting and enduring" and "forms of dying and ending" is not one of "antinomy" (978); rather, queer lasting names the co-constitution, in queer culture, of ending and enduring.[42] My project is propelled by this dialectic of immanent and inflicted forms of futurelessness; it traces the ethical implications of the fact that futurelessness is, in queer culture, not simply a threat but also an affirmative practice (a mode of living and relating and lasting). For queer responses to the threat of cataclysmic endings have been shaped by the ongoing experience of developing creative forms of care and community that don't treat reaching the "future"—or imagining "futures"—as their ultimate aim. When I use the term "futureless" in this project, then, I refer—in a manner different from Hurley and Oh—to those for whom the future, for a variety of reasons, is inaccessible or receding, and/yet who respond by *loosening their attachment to futurity as such*. This loosening manifests as a practiced attentiveness to the lingering possibilities of the past, to the alternatives that already dwell in the present, and to intimacies that are as often residual and etymological as they are recognizably creative.[43] Indeed, the queer archive that I engage makes "futurelessness" legible as a *future-lessness*, an index of what becomes possible when futurity exerts less of a pull on critical imagination and political praxis. Throughout this body of work, interest in "the future" is replaced by "minor forms" of persistence, written in the grammars of queer living and queer dying alike.[44]

Minor Forms and the Politics of Grammar

In tracing such "minor forms," I bring to environmental thought a queer formalist response to futurelessness: one predicated neither on restoring the normative future nor on generating an alternate one, but instead on fundamentally rethinking the *grammar* of relation, possibility, and persistence themselves. For as we have begun to see, widely disparate critical responses to the threat and lived experience of futurelessness share a common grammar of attention, one that paradoxically constrains the very forms of change that they seek. If we return, once again, to the many "futures" proliferating across contemporary thought, we might note that, despite the real differences among them, they all render the future—or "futures," or "futurity" itself—as a *noun*. This likely sounds like a trivial point, the esoteric musing of a literary critic with formalist leanings. But as noun, "the future" cannot but become the object of transitive verbs, something one saves, imagines, stewards, desires, protects, anticipates, fears.[45] The grammatical consensus, in other words, delimits our models of action and efficacy. As Mel Chen reminds us in their work on grammatical animacy, to render a word in noun form is to limit its dynamism, to pigeonhole its power—a tendency, Chen insists, that is only redoubled by the work of pluralizing. Our attachment to the noun, in other word, *fixes* the future, and, with it, the shape of potentiality itself.

This same grammatical structure, importantly, also takes hold in works of scholarship that aim to reject a cultural obsession with futurity—and that we might expect to be key examples for how to think otherwise. A paradigmatic instance is *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, a touchstone of queer theory's antisocial turn, wherein Lee Edelman argues that politics itself presupposes a reproductive futurism embodied by the figure of the child, a fact that "preserv[es] . . . the absolute privilege of heteronormativity," and leaves the queer structurally outside the bounds of both politics and social belonging.[46] Queerness, for Edelman, "attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social" (3) and "com[ing] to figure the bar to every realization of futurity" (4). This polemic, for all its force and influence, nonetheless proves bound by some of the same structural limitations as the logic of Child-as-future that it so incisively impugns. When Edelman says "fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and

with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop" (29), he continues to reify the future (and its metonyms), to treat it as the grammatical object of our transitive acts. Vehement rejection thus proves no less invested in futurity—affectively or grammatically—than is the process of wholehearted embrace. Ultimately, whether we fuck the future (Edelman), turn our backs on it (Heather Love[47]), do everything in our power to protect and conserve it (mainstream environmentalists, "reproductive futurists"), or try to multiply transform it (liberatory scholarship in its various incarnations), the case remains that the future-as-noun remains the locus of attention, no less transfixing for being rejected or being transformed than it is for being embraced.

As I hope is becoming clear, in this project I wish neither to recapitulate the "pro-future" (mainstream environmental thought)/"no future" (antisocial queer theory) debate that animated much early work in queer ecologies (including my own), nor to return to a model of the field that would hypostasize—and stage a confrontation between—ecocritical and queer bodies of work in these terms. Rather, by reading queer texts that relinquish the future as *telos*, I elaborate alternatives to the prevailing grammar of futurity (and its implied political grammar) that otherwise wildly disparate works in queer theory, the environmental humanities, and liberatory criticism often share. In so doing, I seek also to demonstrate the grammatical inventiveness that propels much work in queer temporality.

Indeed, queer studies offers a temporal grammar orthogonal to nominal "futures"—less in its avowed rejections of futurity (which, as we have seen, often adopt the same grammatical structure as various futurisms) than in its exquisite descriptions of the shapes of lives not anchored or propelled by the call of the future. Although it is beyond the scope of this introduction to synthesize the past fifteen years of work in queer temporality, for our purposes here, suffice it to say that this scholarship most often understands queer time as being out of joint or fundamentally *untimely*; "queer" entails resistance to conventional models of growing up and settling down; the feeling of unbelonging within one's own time (Valerie Rohy and Carolyn Dinshaw on "anachronism," Elizabeth Freeman on "temporal drag"[48]); the sensation of earliness (Coviello[49]), lateness (Kate Thomas[50]), and belatedness (Freeman[51]); the experience of being prematurely aged or dying young (Sedgwick). Much of this work—and, more specifically, much of

queer theory's negotiation of futurity—attends to failures to become: the failure to become mature or adult; the failures of forms of queer intimacy to resolve into a form of relation recognizable within the regime of codified homosexuality; the failure of utopian dreams or speculative hopes to become lived realities.

Like many other topics in queer theory, these "failures to become" are topological, taking shapes that diverge from the forms of linear chronological time that environmentalism—especially with its emphasis on "future generations"—tends to privilege. We may think of Kathryn Bond Stockton's model of "growing sideways," Love's account of "feeling backward," or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's engagement, in her writing on terminal illness, with "the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further."[52] We may think of the many texts that privilege a companionate lateralness, from Benjamin Bateman's work on queer survival to Sedgwick's privileging of the adverb "beside" to Lauren Berlant's theorization of "lateral agency" to Freeman's *Beside You in Time*.[53] In the context of the current argument, what may be most striking across these theorizations of queer time is how rarely "the future" appears as such; these critics relinquish a model of time that understands any given moment as substantialized, discrete, static, or self-same. In place of a future, we encounter gerunds and present participles (*feeling* backward, *growing* sideways, the arc of a *becoming*), whose verbal dimensions animate the noun form and dilate it unpredictably,[54] and adverbial choreographies that propel time *beside*, *across*, *backward*, *sideways*, or *errantly*. While these theorists rarely turn their attention to the fact that their negotiations of time entail specific grammars (while relinquishing others),[55] queer authors—especially those writing within scenes of acute futurelessness—explicitly engage the way in which their circumstances alter the grammar of living. For instance, in his keynote speech at OutWrite 1992, delivered seven months before his death from AIDS-related complications, poet Melvin Dixon reflected on the epidemic's toll: "I've lost [my partner] Richard; I've lost vision in one eye; I've lost the contact of people I thought were friends; I've lost the future tense from my vocabulary."[56] Dixon's account not only voices the experience of those for whom the future proves inaccessible, but also indexes the fact that to live

without the future is to fundamentally change the tense in which that life linguistically becomes legible to (and as) itself.

This turn to grammar may risk seeming retrograde or quietist in the face of the pressing political demands that animate both queer and environmental thought. However, this project insists that grammar, far from being an esoteric concern, in fact conditions epistemological and political possibility. Where ecocritics, like other scholars invested in remaking the future, increasingly look to speculative narratives and methods as a way of conceiving the world anew, I understand grammar as a linguistic technology that enables us to imagine and inhabit previously unthinkable relations and temporalities. Whether limning in syntax the relation between subject and object, in tense the relation among past and present and future, in mood the relation between the real and the irreal (the imagined, the wished-for, the unrealized), or in the interplay among these paradigms the relation between selves and all that happens—or fails to happen—to them, grammar maps the complex lineaments of contact and distance, of presence and absence, of intimacy and reticence, that characterize the world as we (don't yet) know it. While Dixon's speech invites us to consider the relationship between losing tense and losing vision, the texts in my archive demonstrate how alternate grammars make unimagined (or forgotten) possibilities visible. Grammar, in other words, offers my authors—and, in turn, their readers—alternative ways to cognize the (many endings of the) world.

In insisting upon grammar's epistemic and political relevance, I build on the insights of minoritarian traditions beyond queer theory, many of which privilege grammar as a model for remaking extant structures of power and thought. For instance, linking the linguistic category of animacy to the politics of race, sexuality, and ability, Mel Chen argues that the animacy hierarchy, treated by linguists "as an avowedly *conceptual* organization of worldly and abstract things with grammatical consequence" is not only "naturally also an ontology of *affect*," but also "political, shaped by what or who counts as human, and what or who does not."[57] In treating the animacy hierarchy as a "particular political grammar" (13), they demonstrate how "objects, animals, substances, and spaces are assigned constrained zones of possibility and agency by extant grammars of agency" (13). But as other critics have demonstrated, to the precise extent that grammar constrains epistemic and political possibilities, it also offers the materials to remake them. In her study of the intimate relationship between western liberalism

and colonialism, Lisa Lowe invokes "a past conditional temporality of 'what could have been,'" both to reveal "conditions of possibility that were vanquished by liberal political reason and its promises of freedom" and "to open those conditions to pursue what might have been."[58] What emerges from such a line of inquiry is nothing less than the "*space of a different kind of thinking*" (40, emphasis mine). Tina Campt similarly turns to an instantiation o the conditional in her reimagining of the relationship between critical method and political realization. As she develops her titular method (and its "quiet soundings") in *Listening to Images*, she argues for a "grammar of black feminist futurity" that moves beyond both the simple future ("what will happen") and future perfect ("that which will have happened") to inhabit the future real conditional ("that which will have had to happen"). "The grammar of black feminist futurity," less subjunctive than imperative, she explains, "is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must."[59]

Perhaps nowhere, however, is the constitutive relationship between linguistic grammars and their lived counterparts—and how transforming one thereby promises to remake the other—more forcefully articulated than in Indigenous thinkers' reflections on the imbrication of language and cosmology. For if, as conversations about language extinction make clear,[60] to lose a language is to lose a world (and, as profoundly, one's instructions for inhabiting it), then grammar itself proves an existential and ethical infrastructure, rendering legible and livable one's relations to one's relations. That American environmental discourse imagines a noun like "the future" to be acted upon, or actualized, by an agentive subject is the product not only of the logics of settler time but also of what the structures of the English language make (un)thinkable. For in both its grammar and vocabulary, English retains the inert discreteness of past, present, and future foundational to linear, "progressive," chronological temporality.[61] As Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us, "English is a noun-based language, somehow appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things."[62] Indeed, English's predominately nominal grammars conjure a world of inanimate, possessable objects; in her account of continuing to unlearn this logic through the process of learning Bodewadmimwin/Potawatomi (an Anishinaabe language),[63] Kimmerer deepens Chen's points about the de-animating

nature of nouns. Reckoning with the word *wiikwegamaa, to be a bay*, she reflects:

> A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. 'To be a bay' holds the wonder that, for a moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores. . . . Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. . . . This is the grammar of animacy. (55)

Such a verbal grammar, it becomes clear, simultaneously maps a geography of living relations and indexes the ongoing dynamism of the world—the perpetual possibility of shapeshifting and for doing (being, living, relating) otherwise.[64]

Importantly, such fluidity stretches across the morphologies of Indigenous languages; in reflecting on nêhiyâwewin (Cree), Two-Spirit writer Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree/nêhiyaw) demonstrates how even its noun forms complicate the stasis foundational to possessive logics:

> I cling to tipiyawesowin ['ownership'] over 'sovereignty' because its tenets of ownership feel reciprocal, accountable—not about possession in its entirety but about maintaining just enough, well enough. I take into consideration the suffix of '-win' in tipiyawesowin, which indicates that this word has been transformed from a verb into a noun. Ownership is therefore not a violent verb; *it is a statement that mutates every time one announces it, a noun without properness in all of its capitalisms*.[65]

In contrast to a language model where nouns retain the imprint of the shapeshifting, provisional verbs that they were (and perhaps still are), English nouns tend to contain, fix, devivify; they tempt us into—and perhaps themselves naturalize—possessive logics. "Our grammar,"

Kimmerer laments, “boxes us in” (56). And the nominal tendency, as I have suggested, also “boxes in” time.

* * *

It is surely no coincidence that thinkers working with the intersecting legacies of settler colonialism, Indigenous dispossession, and transatlantic slavery are those who often turn their attention to the structural workings of grammar. For their scholarship engages the way in which structures of power often operate—and reproduce themselves—to the extent that they are naturalized, rendered simultaneously invisible and inevitable. And among the many structures that illegibly reinforce white supremacy, these authors help us see, are grammatical ones. As Kimmerer’s articulation of how English’s nominal tendencies are “appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things” meets Whitehead’s counterimage of “a [nêhiyâwewin] noun without properness in all of its capitalisms,” they index something like the *grammars* of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson deems “the white possessive” or Cheryl Harris “whiteness as property.”[66] As both Harris and Moreton-Robinson have demonstrated, whiteness exerts—and naturalizes—its colonial force through proprietary logics, a project arguably aided and abetted by a noun-based linguistic system whose “animacy hierarchy” (to again invoke Chen) is entrenched. The “American grammar book,” to adapt Hortense Spillers’s famous phrase, deforms social relations into property relations.[67] To make such an argument is not, of course, to blame nouns for settler colonialism, nor is it, conversely, to fruitlessly imagine that a different grammar is enough to remedy ongoing historical violence. Rather, it is simply to avow that the *grammars* of whiteness may be among the many structures that demand interrupting.

Which is also to say: many of the key terms at stake in this project —“life” and “future” chief among them—themselves are imbricated in the history of white supremacy, and themselves have been wielded as instruments of violence. I will address these histories as the terms arise. But the *intervention* of the project—including the development of an imaginary that brackets the future-as-noun, that tries to think about persistence in nonproprietary and denominalized terms—is one that considers how defamiliarizing the grammatical structures through which those terms enter systems of meaning, and come into relation to each other (and to us, and to

the society we make and unmake), can help to denaturalize the presumptions that their customary functioning inscribes.

The power of grammar, then, is the same as its liability: its slightness. Unlike the broader institutional paradigms that stabilize existing structures of power, grammar is something we constantly, and cannot but, act through and upon in the most quotidian of ways. This makes grammar itself at once eminently usable and totally inappropriable, a common mint, enabling speakers who share little in the way of identitarian markers or political concerns to come into contact not as historical individuals but as denizens of language. By these means, figures as far flung as Sarah Orne Jewett and Samuel Delany can share a grammar, without sharing a vocabulary or a common field of experience. The latter can elaborate the grammatical experiments that the former imperfectly begins, without that work being fully attributable to either of them. Indeed, as we shall see, these authors' shared development of alternate English grammars proves inseparable from their investment in nonproprietary (and otherwise "improper") relations (to romantic partners, to life, to persistence, to death, to language itself), and in collectivizing modes of being where nothing is straightforwardly "one's own." Across their texts, they develop English grammars—and imaginaries of persistence—avowedly *inappropriate (in + ad + propriare)* "to a culture so obsessed with things."

Clearly, then, at the same time that my project stakes a claim to the political relevance of grammatical structures, grammar's seemingly esoteric nature—its distance from the timely demands of the "real world," its indirect relationship to questions of referentiality—proves crucial for imagining what remains unreal or irreal; indeed, I am interested in literary form precisely for the possibilities it can make legible that the world as we know it as yet cannot. Unlike much ecocriticism, which prefers that the relationship between text and world be as direct as possible, and that literary reading itself inform practices of direct action (a fact that in turn renders reading ineluctably futural), this project insists that the indirectness of literature, as of literary reading, can itself be the ground of ethical possibility.[68] And in contrast to what Gregg Crane has critiqued as an increasingly common literary critical tendency to "valu[e] literature for its closeness to and reflection of life," and thus to bypass an "engagement with literary form in favor of exploring the pleasures of lifelikeness"[69]—a habit

that, in his reading, may in fact be precipitating the field's "obsolescence" and "decline"—my project understands the extent to which the text is *not* the world to be less literature's liability than a differential that enables it to act in or on that world.

Residual Formalisms; or, Queer Ecologies, Otherwise

In attending to the way queer lasting takes shape—and becomes thinkable—via specific grammars, I locate this project within an ongoing body of work in queer formalism, a strand of queer studies with which queer ecocriticism as yet has had relatively little contact, and which promises to reorient both the field's readerly habits and the temporal contours of its attention. For the futural bent evident in much queer ecologies scholarship derives not only from the structure of environmental thought but also, methodologically, from a conceit that queerness is, in the words of Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, "radically anticipatory" and, in the words of Elizabeth Freeman, "always ahead of existing social possibilities."[70] Such a temporal commitment accounts for what Ramzi Fawaz identifies as a "near-universal embrace of [the] avant-garde" in queer studies,[71] and a related understanding of forms, in Teagan Bradway's words, "as constraints to be ruptured."[72] Locating "queer" on the cutting edge of culture, this approach tends to endorse the idea that "truly queer queers . . . dissolve forms, disintegrate identities, level taxonomies."[73] Utopian possibility thus becomes associated with formlessness,[74] and, conversely, "formalism, particularly of the literary kind" comes to seem not "very queer."[75] That such an understanding of *queer*'s hermeneutic and social power predominates within queer ecologies can be felt in many tendencies of the field: its privileging of contemporary cultural objects of analysis (Instagram's truck sluts, Alex Jones's gay frog, Isabella Rossellini's *Green Porno*, social media's plant daddies[76]), its relative disinterest in canonical works of literature[77] (and in formalist reading more generally[78]), its locating of conceptual and political possibility within the current, the avant-garde, the new. The insistent futurism of queer ecological scholarship, in other words, affects both what and how the field reads.

Where most work in queer ecologies emphasizes a present inclining futurally toward what could yet be, my own project—inspired by the formalist methods of both ecocritics and queer theorists—lingers with a present shaped by its belated relation to what was and what could have been. In the process, I explore the affordances of being *behind* the curve, not ahead; of tarrying with ostensibly outmoded texts and practices (including close reading); of inhabiting a dislocated, untimely critical present constituted by the complex remainders of the past. In taking such an approach, I build on the work of Margaret Ronda, whose 2018 book *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* reads post-1945 ecopoetry as an archive that engages the evolving crisis logics of the Great Acceleration while dwelling in affirmative tension with the environmental discourse of the period, thereby offering "important historiographical counterpoints to the timely interventions of mainstream" environmentalism.[79] By reading a body of work that is self-consciously and strategically "out of sync with its present" (5) and that develops an "obsolescent imaginary," Ronda also resists modern poetry's (and literary criticism's) "'innovation paradigm'" (15)—which, in an echo of the understandings of queerness outlined above, "refuses the status quo, subverts conventional forms of thinking, and imagines new possibilities for poetic practice," often via practices of rupture and an embrace of the avant-garde. Ronda instead directs our attention to how postwar ecopoets, writing "at nature's end," tarry with residual genres and styles not only to make newly legible the complex shapes of environmental harm that their work thematizes but also to think through poetry's own status as a cultural remainder, its persistence "as a nondominant cultural form" (15). Importantly, in place of innovation, she offers an account neither of poetry's "declension" nor of its irrelevance, but instead of its *residuality*, a paradigm that indexes (to cite her gloss of Raymond Williams) how "prior cultural forms and meanings exert continuing pressure on the cultural forms of the present" (17), and themselves remain an immanent alternative within (or athwart) the dominant. In the process, she demonstrates how an "obsolescent imaginary" is hardly itself obsolete.

Remainders is implicitly animated by a quandary common to much scholarship and activism today: the fact that we often find ourselves arriving to situations late. The toxins have been spilled, the damage done, the revolutions foiled. The cultural power of literature, like the intensity of

activism surrounding various socioecological crises, has waned. The responses available to us often feel attenuated, elegiac, ameliorative. But there is, as my brief account of her argument begins to suggest, an affirmative ambivalence to Ronda's account of remainders, and its relationship to belatedness. On the one hand, for Ronda the ecocritic, the residue of the past is a source of environmental degradation, and our belatedness indexes the calamity of arriving after the damage has been done. On the other hand, for Ronda the formalist reader, the residue of the past—these forms whose moment seems to have passed, or which have outlived their nominal utility—becomes a current site of creative, epistemological, and ethical possibility, and our belated arrival on the scene proves the necessary *precondition* for accessing the force of the residual. In other words, activating the residual as an immanent, if minor, alternative to the dominant *requires* arriving late. Importantly, then, the relation between these two paradigms—material harm and formal possibility—is not symmetrical (residual form cannot directly remediate environmental damage), but dialectical.

Ronda's engagement with how outmoded genres persist and renew is hardly idiosyncratic, and not simply a product of her interest in remainders more generally. Indeed, a brief survey of formalist work indicates a thoroughgoing commitment to engaging nominally obsolete forms, from Fawaz's interest in "conceptually dead" political movements, to Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez's return to "seemingly outmoded formal movements," to Freeman's sense that "daring to ask a question that seem[s] banal, even rearguard, might produce a leap forward."[80] Formalist practices of reading facilitate such a reorientation in attention from the vanguard to the rearguard for at least three primary reasons. First, to engage form is to relinquish an imperative to immediacy in favor of an attention to mediation as such. This proves also to be a methodological interest in distance or difference: as I suggested above, formalist reading embraces the affordances of the text's non-identity with the world, and the aesthetic object's difference from its material referent (if indeed it has one). Importantly, this does not mean abandoning that world or those referents. Rather, it means heeding the way in which both become legible to us, and taking seriously the practices and forms through which the shape of possibility is rendered thinkable anew. To be interested in form is to be interested in how things emerge into and recede from legibility,

unthinkable at one moment and thinkable in the next (or vice versa). Formalists thus linger at thresholds—territories where edges are less cutting than dull—and attend, or attune, to the slivers of possibility that others have left behind. These first two dimensions of formalist attention converge in Ronda's own account of her method, which takes seriously how "greater [historical] tendencies might be glimpsed in small, easily overlooked materials, made perceptible via the mediating capacities of poetic form" (9).

Finally: formalists tend to turn backward not because of a nostalgic desire to preserve the past as it was, but rather because *form is how the past lasts*; temporal distance (the fact of pastness) is the medium through which the power of form itself becomes clear. In other words, it is often when—with the passing of time—the content (or "meaning") of a work becomes less immediate, less transparent, less readily resolved into a course of action, that form begins to crystallize as such, and becomes a site of creative possibility. Freeman's image for this process—that queers, "melancholics all," "hollow out the content of obsolete forms but preserve the husk" (31)—becomes especially resonant when read in conversation with Fawaz's claim that queer forms are "short-term leases," "'temporary,' 'imperfect' outlines" for how to live in the world, and the basis for what he deems a praxis of queer "shapeshifting" (44, 46, 48). In the meeting of these ideas, we can feel the intimate dance of lasting and transience, holding on and letting go. We can also sense how heeding the lingering of the past need not involve nostalgia nor aspire to monumentality. Collectively, such methods insist on form less as a static container than as the dynamic *way* in which possibilities become thinkable in and for a present, a portal to the "ludicrous anachronisms"[81] that exist within—and themselves constitute—any "now."

* * *

This attention to the now's untimeliness proves relevant to how we understand the field-level temporal tendencies of both queer theory in general and queer ecologies more specifically. Indeed, there was a particular moment—the early 2010s—when many queer critics began to worry that a body of scholarship that had always prided itself on currency was becoming dated, that a seemingly "inextinguishable," ever young "Queer and Now" (the title of the opening essay to Sedgwick's 1993 book *Tendencies*) was

giving way to an outmoded “Queer and Then” (the title of a January 2012 article by Michael Warner).[82] Whereas Warner’s argument for the field’s ongoing vitality involves its venturing into new questions and terrain, Freeman’s contribution to the 2011 collection *After Sex?*, which also pondered the state of queer theory, tries less to overcome the field’s temporal distance from center than to articulate the specific (residual) forms of relation that such belatedness affords. In contrast to the model of queerness that would understand it as “always ahead of existing possibilities,” she suggests: “Another way of exploring the temporal axis of queer being might be to see queers as shuffling along behind form, interested in the tail ends of things, willing to be bathed in their fading light” (30–31). I will engage Freeman’s argument in more detail in my final chapter; for my present purposes, what matters is the way in which, for her, such a posture is not restricted to the particular scene of reckoning that animated the *After Sex?* project, but rather exemplary of an ongoing mode of queer work. Indeed, in its attention to continuities between past and present, Freeman’s essay helps us to see that, in addition to long being a field propelled by the avant-garde, queer studies also long has been a field animated by the lingering possibilities of what has been deemed over, extinguished, worthy of discard or abandonment—including the bodies and lives to which AIDS-era activism and carework painstakingly attended. I say this not as a counter to the way in which the field is often understood and practiced, but rather—in keeping with those who have urged us not to reify one body of scholarship or one set of practices as its origin—to index the extant alternatives within the complex history of this work, to trace additional ways in which it has been practiced otherwise.

Such a reorientation of “queer” may have significant ramifications for those of us who work within queer ecologies, a subfield which gained traction precisely at the moment when queer theory was worrying over its own obsolescence. In many respects, the ongoing encounter with environmental questions has proven to be one way that queer theory itself has stayed fresh, relevant, attentive to the most pressing crises of our time, attuned to the demands of the “now.” But by being a force that has helped queer studies retain the sharpness of its cutting edge and retain an understanding of “queer” as structurally emergent, it has, perhaps necessarily, not engaged fully with the lessons that the field learned from outliving the activist energies of its inaugurating moments, and from

reckoning with its aging. Inspired by the queer formalist engagement with the unrealized possibilities of the past, *Queer Lasting* works within a model of queer ecologies that could have been,[83] and allows queerness and ecology to meet via their common (interest in) residuality. In the process, it engages reading practices, critical texts, and literary genres that, not having found a place within the cutting-edge imaginaries of queer ecologies, have themselves too often been remaindered.

In the chapters that follow, I pursue a queer ecocritical reading practice invested in limning possibilities *extant* within both literary form and residual literary modes. By beginning my study with literary regionalism, an always already outdated or backward mode, and proceeding through a series of twentieth-century texts deemed "dead" precisely because they have exhausted their stated political purpose, I ask after the residual power of texts that have reached (this time in the sense of *achieved*) their stated end(s).[84] In somewhat unconventional fashion, I adopt a similar approach in the unfolding of my own argument, returning to some of the same literary texts time and again over the course of multiple chapters. Far from a simple refusal to move forward (or on), this nonfutural or a-telic method enables me to trace the way in which each text's power is hardly exhausted in the course of a given argument, while also demonstrating (as my final chapter will theorize more explicitly) the capacity of old literary forms to become new.

This approach also means that I understand my work to be less speculative or extrapolative than subjunctive. My local arguments will bear out in more detail what such a method entails; for now, let me simply say that I am picking up on another under-remarked grammatical tendency in queer thinking, ranging from Fawaz's attention to the conditional or counterfactual imaginaries at the heart of Joe Brainard's queer comic "If Nancy Was," to Tommy Pico's line "would that doing were saying," which for Amin, Musser, and Pérez, indicates a "subjunctive wish . . . to narrate a resistance to modern colonized existence, in spite of the apparent incapacities of the medium" (237); from Dana Seitler's suggestion that queer misreadings enable "'the reconstruction of unrealized possibilities, practices, and dreams'" to Sedgwick's model of reparative reading, which involves entertaining "such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past . . . could have happened

differently from the way it actually did."[85] Such an approach tarries with the unrealized possibilities that constitute the present, tracing the lingering relevance of what failed to happen in the past—including, as Freeman would have it, our "incomplete, partial, or otherwise failed transformations of the social field" (*Time Binds*, xiii). Indeed, in indexing something like a non-futural imagination, and in enabling us to trace the intimacy of what is with what could have been, the subjunctive inhabits the temporal and heuristic space between what Rob Nixon has deemed literature's "testimonial" and "imaginative" capacities.[86] Neither solely realistic nor solely imaginary, my subjunctive formalism traces the extant possibilities already here, whether or not we realize them.

This approach also shapes the grammars of my own critical attention. Whereas most queer ecological work focuses on recognizably "queer" forms of embodiment and desire encountering recognizably "environmental" settings or paradigms, my formalist method complicates both "sex" and "nature," reading the former ecologically and the latter relationally.[87] My project is thus invested less in bidirectional interventions —in queering the green, greening the queer[88]—than in reading to the dull edges of both fields and dwelling where they already touch. Thus, while I would not go so far as Timothy Morton, who suggests that "fully and properly, ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology: queer ecology," a claim that risks erasing the important ethical, relational, and hermeneutic tensions between the two fields (and thus obscuring the specificity of each field's practices and insights), I would corroborate the more modest claim that precedes it: "Ecology and queer theory are intimate."[89] Intimate, yes, perhaps in that oblique and reticent and ambient sense that I first learned from American literary regionalism.

Dying Genres and Extinction Events; or, How Futureless Writing Lasts

Regionalism, a "minor" literary mode that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century,[90] comprises works that were belated even in their own time, often "turn[ing] their back on the future" rather than anticipating its approach.[91] In attending to the particularities of specific geographic

regions, and the ways and byways of small-town life, regionalist fiction traces the complexity of lives and locales whose apparent eccentricity might otherwise lead them to be overlooked or caricatured.[92] As in the pages of Willa Cather's short story "Old Mrs. Harris," where "the hills [are] full of solitary old women,"[93] the genre frequently attends to elderly, uncoupled, and childless women whose lives place them outside both normative literary plot and the category of literary protagonist. Prioritizing character and setting over event, the regionalist sketch as often meanders as progresses, and more often slides sideways than marches forward; in relinquishing the gravitational (and futural) pull of marriage and reproduction, or the arc of normative maturation and character development, it makes space for seemingly minor happenings, shifts, and intimacies otherwise subsumed by the demands of narrative emplotment. In the introduction to the anthology that first theorized regionalism as a category of its own, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse offer a litany of such minor occurrences: "[I]n Jewett's 'The Foreigner,' two women wait for a storm to pass; in Freeman's 'A New England Nun,' a woman decides not to marry; in Chopin's 'Odalie Misses Mass,' a child doesn't go to church; and in Dunbar-Nelson's 'The Praline Woman,' a woman offers pralines for sale" (xv). If these actions—waiting, deciding not to, not going, offering—are too slight to bear the weight of normative plot, they also, importantly, privilege persistence over change. In contrast to conventional plots that trace transformation across the chronology of individual lives, regionalist sketches more often move athwart communities, and in the process make collective continuity felt.[94] Whereas critics have read this tendency as a preservationist impulse invested in saving fading ways of life before they disappear entirely, I instead (as my local arguments will bear out in more detail) understand it to index regionalism's interest in the ways in which, and the scales at which, queer modes of relation persist in the face of various ends.

As that latter turn begins to indicate, in an inversion of environmentalism's (and speculative fiction's) doubly futural mode, regionalism is multiply futureless. Because it represents the lives of elderly characters, traces modes of collective existence and intimate relationality growing untenable because of significant socioeconomic shifts,[95] relinquishes the momentum of literary plot, and is written by spinsterly (and otherwise nonreproductive) authors, both its detractors and its greatest

champions have declared the mode unable to survive. Interestingly, regionalism's futurelessness has been described by literary critics in many of the same terms that the following chapters limn. It is futureless because terminal: "[I]n its isolation and decay, [regionalism] gives off a luminous but pathetic (if not terrible) beauty—the flush of dying."[96] It is futureless because going extinct: A "literary dead end . . . , figured as a species that [was] no longer able to compete," it "was said to invite its own extinction."[97] It is futureless because "eccentric," in the most literal, structural sense, and consequently at risk of succumbing to "centrifugal forces": amidst the economic "*disintegration* of the coastal towns," both regionalist characters and regionalism as a genre experience "the *withering away* of the enterprise that gave them life" (Berthoff 36, emphases mine). It is futureless because registering the "pressure of decay." It is "isolated and futureless," "morbid" and "sterile." Across such accounts, regionalism is understood to be in a state of "decline,"[98] its "rotting timbers"[99] leaving little possibility for shelter or repair.

In this project, I less resist the notion that regionalism is terminal or decaying or intimate with extinction than challenge the sense that such paradigms intrinsically preclude persistence, community, and care. For across its *longue durée*, regionalism indeed reckons with, and formally instantiates, the end of the world as its authors and characters know it. There are local socioeconomic changes (the decline of the seafaring economy, the rise of industrialism) that promise to bring an end to the ways of life that place a coastal town like Jewett's Dunnet Landing within the world economy. There are catastrophic global events that, in Willa Cather's words, "broke [the world] in two."[100] And within the modes of queer sociability that populate and even constitute the genre, there is the horizon of the Oscar Wilde trial (1895) and the emergence of homosexuality as a taxonomic (and medicalized) category, a shift that, in Fetterley and Pryse's account, regionalism simply couldn't withstand. In the opening pages of *Tomorrow's Parties*, Coviello cites a letter that Henry James wrote to Annie Fields (Jewett's intimate companion), looking back from the other side of the breach. "It is as if, with a great lightness of touch," Coviello reflects, "James enjoins Mrs. Fields to mourn with him *the loss of nothing less than an entire world*, a world in whose terms and horizons of knowledge friends might find each other and be found" (2, emphasis mine). In other words, James is writing as one who has encountered—and lived through—the end

of a world, who has encountered—and lived through—an *extinction*. Ironically, what triggers the latter effect is not the death of a species but the *birth* of one—the Wilde trial as the "spectacular realization of the processes described in [Michel Foucault's] *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, in which, among other things, *the homosexual is invented as a species*, a category of being" (Coviello 8, emphasis mine).[101] What emerged was "sexuality" as we currently know it; what disappeared was not only a version of erotic life amenable to "intimacies [that] do not parse altogether easily in the commonsense vocabulary whose ascendancy James puzzles over" (4–5) but also "any number of broken off, uncreated futures, futures that would not come to be" (20).

Coviello never uses the term "extinction" to describe the loss—the apparent foreclosure of futurity—that attends the birth of the homosexual as a species. But when he writes of Henry James and Annie Fields "suffering the isolation of inhabiting a world, or a vision of the world, that is comprehensible now only to 'the fewest,' and those numbers diminishing" (2), might we not hear echoes of Martha the passenger pigeon, the last of her kind, alone in a cage in a Cincinnati zoo, "ceas[ing] to exist in a world that was no longer as it had been," inhabiting "an existence without others, an existence without sky"[102]—even before we recall that James's letter was written in 1914, the same year as Martha's lonely death? And if we abstract our historical gaze a bit further, might Coviello's parsing of James evoke not only the catastrophic decline of the passenger pigeon, losing its way of life long before the death of the last,[103] but also the catastrophic losses of queer life amidst the AIDS epidemic, its own "numbers diminishing" as in the haunting countdowns of Melvin Dixon's poem "One By One": "You got any T-cells left?/The singularity of death. The mourning thousands./It begins with one and grows by one/and one and one and one/until there's no one left to count."[104] If, finally, we recall that Dixon, like so many seropositive writers, was suffering from cytomegalovirus, which threatened to take his eyesight before it (or another opportunistic infection) took his life, might we not see AIDS as the *literalization* of Coviello's account of the 1890s, where among the many forms of diminishment experienced by Fields and James involved their shared "vision of the world"? Another way to say this: might we not read Fields, James, and Dixon, like Martha, as *endlings*, that word coined first to refer to the last in a family line (the not

uncommon predicament of the queer adult) but quickly adapted to name the final member of a dying species approaching the end of its world?

A familiar trope of extinction narratives similarly emerges in Coviello's curiosity about erotic life "in that bygone era for which James expresses his melancholic nostalgia, *before* the *hardening* of such a distinction into the stuff of present-day common sense" (4, second emphasis mine) and "in the twilit moment *before* the arrival or *calcifying* of the terms of sexual identity" (7, second emphasis mine). Here we see pre-1895 erotic possibilities turned to stone, those earlier "species of love" (a term that will come back in chapter 3) fossilized by the sweeping coordinations of a simultaneously omnivorous and limited sexology. If, in the 1890s, regimes of knowledge calcified sexuality, rendering illegible (if not impossible) the forms of erotic life that had preceded the "invention" of the homosexual, then in the 1980s, it was erotic life itself that threatened to fossilize. Consider the final stanza of Essex Hemphill's "Now We Think," a poem which opens with concerns about a condom's "lethal leak": "Now we think/as we fuck/this nut might kill./This kiss could turn/to stone." If, amidst AIDS, people are *petrified*, Hemphill implicitly reminds us that this term can mean more than one thing.[105]

As this account begins to suggest, it is by inhabiting regionalism's intimacy with death and decline that we can begin to feel its resonances with—its queer lasting as—the literature that emerged nearly a century later. Reading the 1890s and 1980s via extinction events thus has ramifications for how we understand both periods, AIDS literature proving to contain remainders of modes of sociability that literary regionalism highlights precisely as they seem to be passing away. Coviello suggests that the late nineteenth century involves "the experience of sexuality as something in the crosshairs of a number of forms of knowledge and regulation but *not yet wholly captivated or made coordinate by them*. . . . [T]o inhabit an erotic self in the twilit moment *before* the arrival or calcifying of the terms of sexual identity . . . might be to enjoy a special kind of freedom—one threatened, to be sure by the encroachment of a variety of new regimes of sexual knowledge, but whose fragile, uncollapsed spaces of illegibility or definitional ambiguity left precious room for much besides suffering and loneliness: for invention, say . . ." (7). My incongruous juxtaposition of literary periods traces how this condition of being "not wholly captivated"—which, as Coviello indicates throughout his

book, makes space for all kinds of affective and erotic affiliations not today legible as "sex"—persists beyond 1895, which was, of course, neither a clean break nor a site of total(izing) captivation. Where Heather Love demonstrates the way in which orienting our attention away from the domain of sexuality and toward the domain of (bad) affect enables us to read queer history via continuities rather than ruptures,[106] I am suggesting that another source of continuity (a continuity, importantly, that inheres even in the absence of direct resemblance) emerges via the remainders of these pre-captivation modes of affiliation, even in texts whose protagonists (HIV+ gay men, Times Square cruisers) seem to fit cleanly within the taxonomic modes of the twentieth century. In other words, when I read Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* in a way that may seem "spinsterly," I am doing so not to ignore its erotic content but rather to limn the persistence of modes of affiliation that emerge in American regionalist texts. Where Coviello's account of nineteenth-century forms of affiliation reveals what could have been, I'm suggesting that a way to reread the late-twentieth-century texts that interest me is via their embodiment of those very paradigms, their ability to index the lingering presence of the past's unrealized possibilities without necessarily realizing or exhausting them in turn.

When we return to Coviello's opening description of the taxonomizing of sexuality, we might notice that what was lost in that process "was a world in whose terms and horizons of knowledge friends might find each other and be found." But in the following pages, I seek a method where such friends might find each other again, this time across the intimate distance of nearly a full century, and across the boundaries of diegetic levels. In the process of such a reading practice, we ourselves become what Christopher Nealon (via Allen Grossman) deems "hermeneutic friends," creating the interpretive ground in which such intimacies can again take root.[107] For when we acknowledge that the "terms and horizons of knowledge" of regionalist fiction less disappeared than receded, "lost to sight" amidst the blazing legibility of taxonomized categories of relation, we can, patiently, await their reappearance, in the form of hoverings at the far periphery of our gaze or faint echoes at the edges of our hearing. When, at these thresholds, we trace the lasting of these earlier forms, queer modes of kinship appear: the kinship between Willa Cather's middle-aged college professor already "backward" in 1925[108] (as I discuss in Chapter 2) and Allen Barnett's

recent college graduate dying young in 1990 (Chapter 3); between Sarah Orne Jewett's Mrs. Todd, a nineteenth-century spinster herbalist offering remedies from her front door in small-town Maine (Chapter 1) and Dr. Kristen Ries, a twentieth-century lesbian doctor in Salt Lake City, treating seropositive men with the help of Dominican sisters (Epilogue); between the forms of anonymity that condition relation in the regionalist sketch (Chapter 1) and the forms of anonymity that predicate the urban intimacies of cruising (Chapter 4); between the "grammar of the unrealized" inhabited by an enervated husband and father invested in the study of Latin (Chapter 2) and the "etymology of the unliving" mobilized by a dying man invested in how learning dead languages can inform one's approach to epidemic life (Chapter 3).

As my turn to the language of friendship likely already suggests, by reading the literature of HIV/AIDS as an echo—the queer lasting—of late-nineteenth-century regionalism, I am not seeking to make an argument about literary influence, inheritance, or intent. Rather, I am tracing the way that parallel scenes of queer futurelessness exert homologous pressures on—and facilitate homologous possibilities within—language, and am making a case for an unintentional literary kinship based on the shared tendencies and preoccupations that result. In so doing, I develop an approach to literary genealogy inspired by many recent retheorizations of queer relation. Like Rohy, I am curious about the possibilities of "queer affiliation unmoored from linear descent,"[109] and like Coviello, I find myself drawn to "relations that are . . . filial, but not organized by the ties of family."[110] Inspired by E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, such provocations might in turn encourage us to dispense with "lineage as a temporal paradigm in favor of new ways to figure our relation to each other through time."[111] In the process of "figuring [texts' and authors' and characters'] relation to each other through time," my method alters the scale at which we assess works' kinship, facilitating a model of queer literary filiation across differences of time, gender, race, class, genre, and avowed erotic content/contact. By so doing, I trace unexpected intimacies between queer women's writing of the 1890s and gay male writing of the 1980s, producing a fold in our conventional accounts of queer literary history.[112] Although the sexological histories of the sodomite and the lesbian may be quite different, their literary histories, I hope to show, unexpectedly converge.

Chapter Outline; or, the Shape of Queer Lasting

The project unfolds in five chapters. The first two focus on the literature of the (long) 1890s, while the second two trace the unexpected persistence of that literature's forms and preoccupations in the literature of the (long) 1980s. These four chapters unfurl in the shape of a chiasmus, where Chapter 3 gently echoes Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 gently echoes Chapter 1. The final chapter reweaves (or, perhaps, unweaves) the threads of the previous four, turning the project's conceptual and ethical preoccupations into a methodology, and considering what becomes legible about the book—and the resonances across historical periods that it has traced—only "at the last."

The first chapter, "Terminal Regions: Queer Ecocriticism at Life's End," focuses on the relationship between environmental thought and the specific forms of futurelessness involved in terminal illness. In his 1989 book *The End of Nature*, among the first texts to popularize the idea of global climate change, Bill McKibben argued that Americans are reluctant environmental stewards "for the same reason that we usually don't choose friends from among the terminally ill."[113] However, in 1989—at the end of a decade when the AIDS epidemic had ravaged and forever changed the queer community—tens of thousands of Americans were building lives precisely through befriending the terminally ill and developing creative forms of activism in the process. Inspired by this history, the chapter takes McKibben's analogy literally, and imagines a mode of environmental stewardship that, rather than seeking to "save the earth," instead learns from the practices of care and collectivity that have been developed amidst the terminal conditions of queer life. More specifically, I consider the grammatical, conceptual, and ethical resonances across two disparate scenes of terminal friendship: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's late-twentieth-century project of reparative reading—which, in my account, translates her longstanding practice of befriending the terminally ill into a hermeneutic—and Jewett's late-nineteenth-century work of regionalist fiction *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, in which an anonymous protagonist befriends a dying town. By tracing how both writers navigate the region that Sedgwick deems "the ontological crack between the living and the dead," I imagine a response to environmental precarity that, rather than trying to either prevent or effectuate "the end," instead inhabits the complex contours of the

terminal present, and the many "endings" that it entails. By way of closing, I turn my attention to contemporary death doulas, whose work indexes how the terminal present, far from being a space of resignation or amelioration, can be politically galvanizing. Inspired by the way in which death doulaing, like the related practices of HIV doulaing and uprising doulaing, can be read as the lasting of AIDS-era carework and activism, I suggest how the local and intimate practices of care that unfurl at the bedsides of the dying relate to the practices involved in large-scale and collective social change.

The second chapter, "Grammars of the Unrealized: Lost Causes and Subjunctive Possibilities in Willa Cather," considers how queer literature's formalizing of the past's unrealized possibilities recalibrates environmentalist laments about missed opportunities. In contrast to accounts like Nathaniel Rich's *Losing Earth*, an elegy for the "near-misses" of 1980s environmental lobbying, which understand what failed to happen in the past as a "lost cause" consigned to inaccessible oblivion, this chapter offers an alternative approach to non-fruition found within the archive of queer literature, where what can't be realized is often not (only) a political project but (also) queer life itself. More specifically, it turns to Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House*, the seemingly futureless narrative of a seemingly futureless protagonist, which gains its narrative momentum from the titular professor's affirmative relationship to what the past could have been. Gently challenging ecocriticism's prevailing emphasis on speculative gestures and genres by tracing the affordances of the past subjunctive, the chapter traces how the text's queer grammars limn and reactivate what the past could have, but failed to, become. In so doing, it recasts recent critical work on the unrealized possibilities of the past in formalist terms, demonstrating how Cather's queer play with conjugated and infinitive verbs offers a path between what Lisa Lowe has deemed "the world that is and the world we might have made" (174). The chapter concludes by reading the final section of *The Professor's House*, in which the protagonist, whose life has just been saved by a spinster seamstress, manages for the first time to "face the . . . future," alongside Cather's preface to her edition of *The Country of Pointed Firs*, also published in 1925, which (seemingly mistakenly) prophesied for the regionalist work a "long joyous future."[114] Asking what kind of future a spinster death doula can midwife, I consider regionalism's own unrealized lasting, and set the stage for the project's turn to the late twentieth century.

The third chapter, “Queer Unliving: Species of Extinction in the Literature of HIV/AIDS,” engages the rhetoric of extinction—an increasingly important topic in the environmental humanities—as it figures in the AIDS crisis as lived in the United States. Offering a rereading of AIDS literature as an archive of species extinction written from within, I begin by considering how the threatened extinguishing of a group that has never been deemed normatively alive complicates ecocritical and environmentalist understandings of extinction, which tend (seemingly necessarily) to presume the existence of “life.” Reading poems by Paul Monette and Essex Hemphill that cast the mass deaths of AIDS in terms of extinction and reflect on the experience of being “an endangered species,” I consider what becomes thinkable—about both the 1980s and our present moment—when we consider the epidemic and its losses in terms of extinction rather than (as has more often been the case in retrospective critical accounts) apocalypse. I then turn my attention to the question of language’s own vitality and identify a tendency for seropositive authors—including poet Melvin Dixon and fiction writer Allen Barnett—to wrestle with extinction by queerly engaging etymology. In offering models of persistence and kinship not predicated on the reproduction of life, etymology reorients queer survival away from vital(ist) futurity and toward the question of how extinct forms themselves last and change. It thus enables those writing from within the crisis to navigate the temporal, ontological, and ethical questions that the horizon of extinction poses. In the course of this discussion, I linger with Barnett’s “Philostorgy, Now Obscure” (1990), which I read as an accidental rewriting of *The Professor’s House*. As Barnett’s protagonist uses the practice of etymologizing both to redefine the “natural love” of the story’s titular term and to reactivate the possibilities of his “unlived life,” the story traces the narrow space of possibility between obscurity and obsolescence while also embodying the queer kinship between regionalism and AIDS literature.

The fourth chapter, “Cruising the Planet: The Sexual Ecology of Samuel Delany,” offers the practice of cruising—predicated on futureless encounters—as an unexpected model for an ecological ethic more deeply attuned to our impersonal intimacies with the human, nonhuman, and elemental strangers that constitute our environment and ourselves. In order to develop such a model, the chapter looks both to Leo Bersani’s 2002 essay “Sociability and Cruising,” which culminates in a gestural link

between cruising and ecology, and (primarily) to Delany's 1999 book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, which theorizes the way in which local sexual encounters in Times Square porn theaters between 1975 and 1995 spread throughout the urban environment more generally, lasting—often ambiently and illegibly—beyond their ostensible end. Such a logic of queer persistence also extends to the text itself, which embodies the lasting of AIDS literature (and its animating concerns) beyond the peak of the epidemic. Insofar as cultures of casual sexual contact were another casualty of the disease, Delany's text simultaneously bears witness to a vanishing "way of life" and demonstrates how the affirmatively temporary practices involved in cruising model a possible response to their own endangerment. In the process, it also offers an alternate way of rethinking the paradigms of temporality, intimacy, (non-)identity, and causality at the heart of environmental thought. For in his argument and his rhetorical practices, Delany suggests a collateral model of care that, in contrast to the narrowing that both gentrification and pragmatic politics involve, embraces the "infinite breadth" of erotic life and develops ways to move sideways, together—not despite but precisely through our mutual strangeness. The forms of affirmative disinterest, impersonal intimacy, ambient relation, and non-teleological care at stake in such a practice, I demonstrate, unexpectedly echo the relational paradigms of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*, thereby making legible the ecological stakes of Delany's recognizably queer project, and again linking the gay male canon of the 1980s and 1990s to queer women's writing of the 1890s. In tracing the surprising resonances between these nominally unrelated texts, I articulate an approach to reading across periods that follows the model of cruising, heeding a glancing touch between literary traditions that matters precisely to the extent that it remains uncodified and unnamed.

The final chapter, "Persistent Decay: Queer Half-Lives and the Poetics of Fallout," considers how the project's excavation of forms of lasting that emerge amidst scenes of apparent futurelessness can alter the grammars in which we understand and formalize the persistence of the past. It offers "fallout"—a figure that first emerges in my reading of Delany in Chapter 4—as a way of tracing the forms of dissipation, dislocation, and drift that often characterize the way that the harm of the past remains, and thus also suggests displacing our critical emphasis on "afterlives" in favor of the more temporally and ontologically complex term "half-lives." Culminating

the book less by neatly tying its threads together than by engaging in a Sedgwickian "art of loosing," the chapter engages in a recombinatory method that follows previous chapters' texts and arguments as they spread to sites far from where they originated, and wield unexpected effects in turn. It begins by demonstrating the long-standing link between queer theory and paradigms of fallout: not only because of the extent to which queer reading practices often move centrifugally (and decenter the nuclear family) but also because of the frequency with which those writing in the early days of the field linked the disaster of HIV/AIDS to the disaster of the Chernobyl explosion. Reading rhythms of falling in and falling out, residual damage and residual possibility, as they ramify across the periods of queer literature that the book has engaged, I demonstrate how a genealogy of queer terminal thought can be written in a lexicon of nuclear decay. I then transpose this insight into a readerly methodology, tracing the formal resonances between queerness and fallout by returning to *The Professor's House*, and lingering with the protagonist's realization that his predicament involves less a tragic downfall than the experience of "falling out" of the family. Taking into account the fact that the novel was published one year after the phrase "nuclear family" entered the American lexicon, the chapter reads its famously strange structure as embodying a queer poetics of fallout, one that traces how lasting can take the form of dissipation and decay, and allows us to glimpse other possibilities for narrating the way that (nominally concluded or futureless) events simultaneously fade and remain, often not in self-same form. The chapter concludes by attending directly to Cather's status as a cultural remainder. Developing an account of reparative reading as involving the practice of "falling out" of love, it offers a way of understanding the persistent relevance (and conceptual utility) of texts whose cultural import—like our attachment to them—has diminished.

In a brief epilogue, I turn to the Salt Lake City medical office of Dr. Kristen Ries, for years the only physician in the state of Utah willing to care for people with AIDS. The demographics of her practice, referred to by other doctors as "the gays and the grays," meant that in her waiting room in the 1980s "gay guys helped old ladies with their knitting while they shared funeral plans and their hopes for the afterlife."[115] Taking this scene as an unexpected afterimage for the present book, I read her waiting room as emblematic of the many "half way" and "mid-world" spaces that populate

the other chapters, and reflect on the collective work that can be undertaken precisely there.

1

Terminal Regions

Queer Ecocriticism at Life's End

In his 1989 book *The End of Nature*, widely credited with introducing the concept of global climate change to a mainstream audience, Bill McKibben accounted for Americans' hesitancy as environmental stewards by explaining that "the end of nature . . . makes us reluctant to attach ourselves to its remnants, for the same reason that we usually don't choose friends from among the terminally ill."[1] This comment—which can easily pass unnoticed, coming as it does late in a book full of startling ethical and scientific claims—emblematizes the phobic stance toward illness, frailty, and death apparent in much environmental (or, more properly, environmentalist) discourse. It almost goes without saying that mainstream environmentalism long has been an intensely vitalist movement, its rhetoric and practices invested in healing, in promoting life, in saving the planet on which we dwell. For a political movement which seeks to guarantee nothing less than the future of life itself, an illness that can't be healed, like a planet that can't be saved, seems to preclude both successful activism and effective care.

Indeed, that environmentalists' goal involves saving has come to seem so self-evident that such rhetoric traverses, and thus implicitly links, quite disparate projects, from the work of the Nature Conservancy to the All We Can Save Project, a trans-inclusive intersectional feminist collaborative working for climate justice.[2] Whether we are seeking to save the Earth (Nature Conservancy), the future (David Wallace-Wells, as discussed in the introduction), or, more modestly, "all we can," that *rescue* is a worthy mission hardly seems up for debate. But if we linger with this environmentalist imperative, we might notice that it is grounded in many of the same presumptions as McKibben's reluctance to choose friends from among the terminally ill. Both seem to render meaningful intimacy, or care,

as a matter of anticipated returns, a posture that is animated not only by capitalist logics but also, as Donna Haraway has suggested, by a "kind[] of futurism[]" that presumes "that only if things work do they matter";[3] such an approach—precisely in its aversion to failure—risks short-circuiting the kinds of contingency and surprise and collateral effects that can emerge from projects at which we do not (or, more profoundly, cannot) succeed.[4] Relatedly, both presume longevity as an index of significance, or as the privileged measure of relational and activist efficacy, rendering illegible the power of transient, fleeting, or temporary relationships.[5] Finally, both seem to envision a straightforwardly agentive subject—the environmentalist or the friend—positioned firmly within the world of the living, able to "save" an ailing planet, on the one hand, and, on the other, free to "choose" friends whose lived experience won't confront us with the terror of our own mortality. Such an approach not only risks falsifying the realities of our planetary condition but also obscures what becomes possible when we relinquish the exceptionalism of the living. If we are not quite so ready as McKibben to align terminality with foreclosure, how do we relate to those who are dying? And how can such a line of inquiry help us differently approach the task before us as environmental stewards, which might involve, precisely, the work of tending to, and befriending, a dying planet?

In the face of such a provocation, we might find ourselves drawn to the work of Roy Scranton, who confidently has proclaimed that the task of the Anthropocene involves "learning how to die."[6] Scranton transposes his military experience in Iraq to the civilian experience of global climate change, arguing that, amidst the inevitable upheavals confronting the planet, "[t]he biggest problem we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is *already dead*."[7] As a model for how to confront this reality, he offers the meditative practice that he developed during his active duty, when, heeding the lessons of an eighteenth-century Samurai manual, he "meditate[d] each morning on [his] inevitable end": "[B]efore we rolled out through the gate, I'd tell myself that I didn't need to worry, because I was already dead. . . . Instead of fearing my end, I owned it." While Scranton ostensibly refuses the imperative to save, he in fact seems simply to invert its terms, leaning into a vision of death no less reified—and no less exceptionalized—than is the familiar environmentalist investment in life. Indeed, Scranton's model of the "already dead" itself proves to be salvific,

saving us not from death but rather, and perhaps no less problematically, from the very process of dying itself.[8] Ultimately, whether embracing the vitalist imperative to save or a militaristic model of death, the prevailing approaches to environmental terminality evacuate what Teagan Bradway describes as the "eroding present of dying": a realm which (to adapt Peter Coviello's account of uncodified sexuality's own terminal period) "[leaves] precious room for much besides suffering and loneliness."[9] As we shall see, this "much besides" includes modes of being and relating that relinquish the possessive individualism so foundational to Scranton's account (which insists on "own[ing]" even death), and instead demonstrate all that can emerge amidst the forms of unbecoming that terminality itself entails.[10]

In this chapter, then, I ask after the possibility of fully inhabiting, rather than resisting or evacuating, the terminal present, and suggest how such an approach can open environmental stewardship to unexpected forms of agency, temporality, and care. Whereas the imperative to save renders life and death (and the possibilities of saving the planet or *Losing Earth*[11]) oppositional, and thus casts the space between them as "uninhabitable,"[12] those who live (with) terminal illness and practice palliative care teach us precisely how to dwell within such a space, gently tracing the relational, spatial, and temporal dimensionality of a territory—an experiential region—too often cast as a simple breach or foreclosure. In so doing, they offer us lessons in all that can still be done—and all that can still become possible—when the possibility of saving is off the table, but processes of living and dying and tending and caring nevertheless persist.

In developing such an argument, I join a range of thinkers across fields who have reckoned with what artist-theorist Jill Casid describes as the "dangers to [the] life imperative," challenging the bromides that presume the preservation of life and longevity as an unquestioned good.[13] From cultural theorist Eric Cazdyn's mobilizing of "the force of the terminal"[14] as a way of bringing about the radical political change that the "new chronic mode" constitutively precludes, to cultural geographer Caitlin DeSilvey's practice of "palliative curation," which cares for decaying material structures without seeking to conserve or control them, to Casid's insistence that we develop a process of "deathcare" that cultivates the "possibilities for a good death at the edge of the natural, moral, and human" (122), and insists upon "understand[ing] death as something more and other than the

negative end of life" (125), scholars increasingly have found themselves considering what becomes possible when, in DeSilvey's terms, we "unshackle ourselves from the instinctive leap to save at all costs."[15]

And so too do I link hands with an intergenerational queer community whose lives and friendships and activism and hermeneutic practices long have been intimate with terminal illness, and who long have been attuned to what terminality itself both precludes and enables. In the first half of the chapter, I return to the historical context of McKibben's comment, when, in the face of the AIDS epidemic, tens of thousands of Americans were building lives *precisely* through befriending the terminally ill, and developing creative forms of care and community in the process. More specifically, I look to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who was asking after the possibility of dwelling within—and relating across—"the ontological crack between the living and the dead" well before being diagnosed with the breast cancer that would remake her scholarship and eventually take her life.[16] Remarkably, Sedgwick's body of work treats terminality not as an exceptional condition but rather as a constitutive one, and not as a realm defined by dwindling time but rather as itself a (spatialized) temporality in which alternate forms of relation and ethical investment can be developed. Far from being proof of failure or a site of nihilism, the terminal condition in Sedgwick's account attunes those who live and die within it to the "middle ranges of agency," making space for the kinds of practices too often rendered invisible within popular environmentalism's imaginary of heroic action or tragic loss: tending and attending and companioning; waiting and watching and easing; loosening and letting go; living with and dying with; teaching and learning; befriending; even reading and writing themselves.

While projects committed to saving the earth read the advent of terminality as proof that it is, catastrophically, too late to achieve our goals, the queer writers and caretakers whom I engage in this chapter model how to inhabit a belatedness that is not the same as a too-lateness. Letting the "end" of life dilate into a process of "ending" involving gentle adverbial shifts and a habit of care inseparable from the close, quiet, tender attention it so often entails, they offer us an alternate way of living life's ending. Predicated as it is on an embrace of *contingency*—both in the familiar, definitional sense of being open to chance and in the etymological sense of

“touching together” (*con-tangere*)—the practice of befriending the terminally ill might teach us how to inhabit the contact zone between living and dying, intervening and letting be, embracing and relinquishing that constitutes both current environmental conditions and the forms of response for which they call.

Inspired by the fact that contingency’s dual meanings index both the time of touch and the touching of time, the chapter culminates by letting the late-twentieth-century queer context touch its late-nineteenth-century counterpart, a process that also enables DeSilvey’s emphasis on terminal environments to touch Sedgwick’s emphasis on terminal friendship. Here, I turn my attention to that literary mode composed within the collective experience of terminality, and within the narrow, “twilit”[17] crack between belatedness and too-lateness: American regionalism—a nominally futureless genre featuring portraits of aging communities “left behind”[18] by a shifting global capitalism. Focusing on Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, in which an anonymous narrator develops a “true friendship” with Dunnet Landing, a village characterized as “dying” in much of the critical literature, I limn how the text formalizes many of the postures and practices that Sedgwick, DeSilvey, and Casid (among others) associate with tending to terminal bodies and structures. Ultimately, by demonstrating how both Sedgwick’s essays and Jewett’s sketches train us in a mode of textual relation inseparable from the terminal conditions of their emergence, I suggest how the work of befriending the terminally ill might shape environmental politics and ecocritical hermeneutics alike. Rather than enter an overdetermined debate about whether practices of literary reading have any hope of saving the world, I instead offer queer reading as an ethical practice keenly attuned to what becomes possible when things (bodies, literary modes, the world itself) cannot be saved.

“Across the Ontological Crack”: Eve Sedgwick’s Terminal Regions

Sedgwick’s late writings[19] embody how the ongoing—even lifelong—work of “learning how to die” transforms both interpersonal and textual relation, and in the process model how to live, how to befriend, and how to read within terminal regions. For although her bodily condition did not

technically become “terminal” until the 1990s, terminality retroactively came to serve as a touchstone for how she understood the full import of her life’s work. In a 2000 talk, she reflected on her first faculty job at Hamilton College, which had absorbed a nearby women’s college in 1978, the year that she arrived: “[T]he small group of women faculty embarked together on an exhausting, but also immensely exhilarating, project of intensive education in feminist thought. We had to educate ourselves, our students, and our colleagues and institution, all at the same time. One factor that made things easier was that many of us had been hired on a *long-term (4 years) but terminal basis*—so there was nothing to deter us from taking professional risks in our adversarial relation to this college.”[20] It seems hard to imagine that, in the year 2000—two decades into the AIDS epidemic, and four years after her breast cancer recurred and metastasized to her spine—Sedgwick would invoke the term “terminal” casually; rather, the appearance of this word in this context indexes the way in which, throughout Sedgwick’s life, terminality proved the ground not for resignation but for collective action—including collectivizing forms of teaching and learning. Indeed, the change that Sedgwick insisted upon at—and helped bring to—Hamilton was predicated on, not pre-empted by, the foreshortened temporality of her position, just as her ethical commitment to the work was enlivened, not foreclosed, by the fact that any future for that place (and, more importantly, for its students and faculty) would not be hers to live.[21]

Sedgwick addresses the possibility that terminal conditions themselves condition specific, and queerly non-futural, habits of relation, thought, and action more expansively—and more literally—in “White Glasses,” a 1991 tribute to her dying friend Michael Lynch composed while the shape of her own living was shifting precipitously:

> When I decided to write “White Glasses” four months ago, I thought my friend Michael Lynch was dying and I thought I was healthy. Unreflecting, I formed my identity as the prospective writer of this piece around the obituary presumption that my own frame for speaking, the margin of my survival and exemption, was the clearest thing in the world. In fact it was totally opaque: Michael didn’t die; I wasn’t healthy; within the space of a couple of weeks, we were dealing

> with a breathtaking revival of Michael's energy, alertness, appetite—also with my unexpected diagnosis with a breast cancer already metastasized to several lymph nodes . . . The I who [writes] is . . . a different one with new fears and temporalities, a newly sharpened appreciation of the love of friends and comrades, new experience of amputation and prosthesis, new knowledge, expectations, angers, luxuries, and dependencies.[22]

In the shift from "prospective" to actual writer, which intersects with the shift from one who knows abstractly that she could some day be sick to one who knows definitively that she already is, Sedgwick not only relinquishes "the margin of [her] survival and exemption," a posture that I earlier described as the exceptionalism of the living, and that she admits was still —even amidst her immersion in AIDS carework and activism—her "own frame for speaking," but also begins to inhabit the many forms of "new"ness that illness augurs. That she casts a potentially terminal diagnosis as a site of several "new" possibilities (including a new relation to what is already present), just as she cast the beginning of what proved to be a meteoric career as "terminal," not only confounds any easy distinction between beginnings and endings[23] but also serves as a hard-won acknowledgment of all that can emerge from terminal conditions: friendship, solidarity, change, activism, work, failure, grief, loss, anger, fear, despair, desire, pedagogy, *life* (for as long as it lasts).[24] Indeed, the way in which terminality recurs across Sedgwick's self-descriptions renders it a through line of her adulthood, something she ultimately learned to "*liv[e] powerfully with* . . . largely from men with AIDS." The cross-identifications here resound: not only between a woman with breast cancer and gay men with AIDS but also between the nominally healthy young professor teaching terminally and the terminally ill professor she would later become learning "lessons" in how to "powerfully" live and die. Importantly, across these scenes, "power" is measured not in the durability of any one body (or life, or career) but instead in forms of provisional comradeship and commitment—from the work of "with"ness that terminal conditions demand, in and for the here and now.

If there seems to be a tension across these paragraphs—between terminality as lifelong condition and terminal diagnosis as punctual event,

between terminality as a source of continuity and terminality as a source of newness and change, between terminality as a realm where normative vitality recedes and terminality as a space where possibilities emerge—then that is, indeed, part of the point. For in a body of work that rejected easy binaries, including the opposition of continuity and change,[25] terminality, no less than Buddhism, became a realm in which Sedgwick learned to "live with" nondualism, and to develop practices of relating to significant others —whether friends or texts or the self—in the "middle ranges of agency" that such circumstances demand. As we shall see, by tracing the queerly afutural practices of knowing and relating and acting that remain—and become—possible at the end,[26] Sedgwick's late work reveals the immanent ethical possibilities of the terminal present.

* * *

The complex dimensionality of this present first becomes evident in "White Glasses," where Sedgwick dilates, and lingers in, the narrow slivers of possibility that terminal regions entail. Near the midpoint of the essay, she reflects on the fact that many of the points of "shared reference" grounding her intimacy with Michael Lynch are dead queer women: "If what is at work here is an identification that falls across gender, it falls no less across sexualities, across 'perversions.' And across the ontological crack between the living and the dead" (257). While this latter formulation most immediately references their shared attachment to (reading) Willa Cather and Emily Dickinson, among others, it also indexes the necessary crossing that soon will differently and more fundamentally condition their friendship, even as Sedgwick's recent cancer diagnosis makes it unclear who will occupy the far side first.

The ontological crack between the living and the dead—an inhabitable space that entails specific practices—thus comes to serve as model for the challenges and possibilities of terminal relating. As a formulation that originally serves to describe the practices of cross-identification involved in queer reading but comes to index the forms of crossing internal to a friendship and, ultimately, to a life, it maps the complex way that terminality inflects both Sedgwick's hermeneutics and her ethics, shaping how she reads as much as how she befriends. Indeed, if the scene describing her relationship with Michael Lynch suggests how their process of reading

together unexpectedly informed their process of dying together,[27] then elsewhere in Sedgwick's late work, we witness the inverse: a practice of learning how to read shaped by the practice of learning how to die.

For instance, in the introduction to *Touching Feeling*, she discusses how her joint encounters "with mortality and with Buddhism" catalyzed a "decreasing sense of having a strong center of gravity in a particular intellectual field." This led her, in turn, to "ungrasp [her] hold" and develop an "art of *loosing*," in which "life, loves, and ideas might then sit freely, for a while, on the palm of the open hand" (*TF* 2–3). Here, she models an approach in which the response to terminal unraveling is not to grip more tightly but to develop affirmative practices of relinquishment. As she dilates Elizabeth Bishop's famous "art of losing" into her own "art of *loosing*,"[28] Sedgwick begins to inhabit the space between salvation and loss—the "excluded middle" (*TF* 8) that environmentalism often finds so unimaginable.

Such loosing achieves its most powerful—and most influential—hermeneutic form in her theory of reparative reading. Seeking to loosen the hold of paranoid logics over literary criticism, her "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" essay—still perhaps the most famous, and most widely discussed, account of queer reading—"opens a space" for "weak" modes of reading and "local" pathways of thought often cast into shadow by the "unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia" (130). The role that terminal friendship plays in this deroutinizing of critical practice becomes explicit at the one moment in the essay where Sedgwick directly engages her own health:

> A more recent contingency, in the brutal foreshortening of so many queer life spans, has deroutinized the temporality of many of us. . . . I'm thinking, as I say this, of three very queer friendships I have. One of my friends is sixty; the other two are both thirty, and I, at forty-five, am exactly in the middle. . . . In a "normal" generational narrative, our identifications with each other would be aligned with an expectation that in another fifteen years, I'd be situated comparably to where my sixty-year-old friend is, while my thirty-year-old friends would be situated comparably to where I am.

> But we are all aware that the grounds of such friendships today are likely to differ from that model. . . . Specifically, living with advanced breast cancer, I have little chance of ever being the age my older friend is now. My friends who are thirty are equally unlikely ever to experience my present, middle age: one is living with an advanced cancer caused by a massive environmental trauma (basically, he grew up on top of a toxic waste site); the other is living with HIV. The friend who is a very healthy sixty is much the likeliest of us to be living fifteen years from now.
>
> . . . On this scene, an older person doesn't love a younger as someone who will someday be where she now is, or vice versa. No one is, so to speak, passing on the family name; there's a sense in which our life narratives will barely overlap. There's another sense in which they slide up more intimately alongside one another than can any lives that are moving forward according to the regular schedule of the generations. It is one another immediately, one another as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further, whom we each must learn to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company. (148–149)

Although there is much to say about this passage, I want to focus my discussion on two main topics: first, the way in which terminality for Sedgwick becomes not simply a state but also a (readerly) practice, and second, the complicated—and importantly inclusive (or, to use one of Sedgwick's own terms, universalizing)—paradigms of belonging that inhere in this model of the terminal condition. To begin, it seems important to note how friendships between the terminally ill—friendships "in which . . . life narratives will barely overlap, [but also] . . . slide up more intimately alongside one another than can any lives that are moving forward according to the regular schedule of the generations"—dovetail with the stance of the reparative reader, who resists "the dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality . . . which . . . takes its shape from a generational narrative characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness" (147). Although critics often connect the two under the rubric of queerness—the "three queer friendships" embodying the "queer possibility . . . that . . . generational relations don't always proceed in . . . lockstep"—Sedgwick's own work invites us instead to elide (or temporarily suspend) the middleman. What if to read reparatively, in other words, is not

only to read queerly, but also to read terminally? And what if terminality, in turn, were understood not simply as a condition, but also as a deeply ethical practice in which we all (regardless of our current health) can and must engage?

This possibility leads in turn to the second question introduced above, and to the matter of belonging. Here, I want to attend not to Sedgwick herself, and not to her friends living with terminal illness, but rather to the "very healthy" sixty-year-old, who—amidst their health, amidst their prophesied longevity—remains a queer participant in these friendships, and remains a denizen of the terminal world. (In my formulation of this possibility, we might hear echoes of Susan Sontag's claim, at the start of *Illness as Metaphor*, that we all carry passports for both the kingdom of the ill and the kingdom of the well.[29]) To relate across the ontological crack requires relinquishing the presumptions of the healthy, futural self and inhabiting terminality as a fundamentally collective, and fundamentally ethical, space. In Sedgwick's account, terminality is the province not solely of individuals but also of communities, and serves not as the end of or barrier to relation but rather as relation's very rhythm and ground. Like queerness itself, terminality here yields an alternative to normative family structures, normative identificatory paradigms, and normative modes of temporal unfolding. What new paradigms of agency and community might emerge, Sedgwick invites us to ask, if we treated terminality as a collective condition that we (to differing degrees) all share?

Such a possibility—like the forms of queer nondifferentiation that it entails—becomes even more pronounced in the remarkable essay "Pedagogy of Buddhism," where Sedgwick reflects directly on the work of learning how to die and, in the process, indexes the relational grammars involved in befriending the terminally ill:

> [T]he instructions for dying are actually the same as the instructions for working with the dying. Both teaching and learning in this situation involve the most passive and minimal of performances. "Opening to" (a person or predicament), "opening around" or "softening around" (a site of pain), *listening*, relaxation, spaciousness, patience in the sense of *pateor* or lying open, shared breathing: these practices of nondoing, some of them sounding hardly more than New Age commonplaces,

> seem able to support a magnetic sense of the real far into the threshold of extinguished identity. . . . And it's a surprise, though it shouldn't be, that a nondoing verging on extinction would be the condition of possibility for *companionship* in these realms of unmaking.[30]

It seems that what is "extinguished" here is not only identity but also, relatedly, the security of the dividing line to which McKibben implicitly clings: between the healthy and the terminally ill, between living and dying, between the saved and the doomed, between self and other. Indeed, we might observe that there is an intimate relationship between "dying" and "working with the dying"—not only because to companion the terminally ill involves relinquishing our attachment to our own vitality but also because, in keeping with the queer self-companioning that animates much of Sedgwick's late work, the process of dying involves working with the dying (self). Like the scenes of Tibetan Buddhist pedagogy that interest her earlier in the essay, and in contrast to the forms of possessive individualism that animate both McKibben's and Scranton's accounts of "the end," "[t]his teaching situation, [too], . . . functions as a mysteriously powerful solvent of individual identity," yielding the "rich yet dissolvent relationality of pedagogy itself" (160).

And so too does this scene complicate what we understand terminal agency to involve, for the condition of companionship here is not just shared vulnerability but also shared *nondoing* (opening to, opening around, softening around, listening, lying open, breathing together, unmaking), a set of practices that dwells somewhere between the reified categories of action and inaction, and inhabits what Sedgwick calls "the middle ranges of agency," the "only" realm "that offer[s] space for effectual creativity and change":

> [One] problem with reifying the status quo is what it does to the middle ranges of agency. One's relation to *what is* risks becoming reactive and bifurcated, that of a consumer: one's choices narrow to accepting or refusing (buying, not buying) this or that manifestation of it, dramatizing only the extremes of compulsion and voluntarity. Yet it is only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change. (*TF* 13)

What the ontological crack—the terminal condition—thus requires is an alternate relation to *what is*, one invested not in the kind of "choice" foundational both to the consumerist model that Sedgwick critiques and to McKibben's account of "choos[ing] friends from among the terminally ill," but in what we do when certain choices and options are off the table (when we or our friends are already sick, when those who are already our friends are diagnosed, when saving and healing are no longer possible, etc.), and when the question at hand is thus how best to relate to what *remains*. As the transitive, teleological actions of "accepting" and "refusing" give way to the intransitive practices of nondoing, terminal care not only loosens the distinctions between activity and passivity but also defamiliarizes what it means for such efforts to "work" or "succeed." Indeed, within Sedgwick's terminal regions, reading and befriending themselves become less transitive in valence, predicated as they are on loosening their hold on their objects, and relinquishing their commitment to particular conceptual or relational ends. In all of her intertwined projects—befriending and thinking, reading and dying—Sedgwick pursues what Bradway has deemed "an ethical relationality premised on the present,"[31] a mode of care predicated on the immanence of becoming rather than on a concern with what that becoming will become.

Ultimately, across her writings, Sedgwick models the relational and the hermeneutic work of attending to, and reckoning with, "*what is*," of relinquishing routinized habits and responding instead to the contingent relations emerging "beside," "between," and around us, with all of their recalcitrant, agonizing, inspiring, surprising, quotidian demands. This is, in Casid's words, the work of "attending closely" (134) foundational to deathcare. It is, to invoke both Sedgwick and DeSilvey, the very labor of *tending*, whether in the sense evoked by Sedgwick's *Tendencies* or via DeSilvey's reminder that her project of palliative curation is etymologically linked to the Latin *curare*, to tend. It is, in the language of who have narrated the work of palliative care literarily, the form of attention required to notice gentle, adverbial shifts of and within the terminal present: "He wasn't getting any better. He was just getting worse *more slowly*."[32] It is, to return to that remarkable passage from "Pedagogy of Buddhism," the work of heeding the gentle prepositional modifications of ongoing practices, "opening *to*" imperceptibly giving way to "opening *around*."[33] And it is, to invoke Elizabeth Freeman, a mode of textual attention inspired by a queer

legacy of embodied close reading, a tradition of queers being "*close . . . readers of one another and of dominant culture*": "in taking care of our own, we have been forced to stay close, to wash one another's sweat-soaked sheets in Fab when no one else would."[34]

If, in such an account, the practices of terminal befriending become nearly indistinguishable from practices of textual reading, that is hardly a coincidence. For, in the inverse of that formulation, Sedgwick's deroutinized critical habits—the open palm, which ultimately gives way to "interdigitat[ing]" modes of reading (*TF* 145); the positioning "beside"[35]; the embrace of temporary practices whose power is not dependent on reaching predetermined ends—consistently evoke the posture of the friend at the bedside, demonstrating the inseparability of the fundamentally corporeal practices of terminal thought and terminal care. Perhaps, then, the kinship that Sedgwick identifies between "the instructions for dying" and "the instructions for working with the dying" similarly conjoins dying and reading, two dilated verbs that, in Sedgwick's account at least, can happen nowhere other than the present, in all the complex fullness of its becoming.

"We parted, the best of friends": Sarah Orne Jewett's Terminal Regions

Although such terminal ethics and hermeneutics may seem to be the product of particular historical circumstances—developed by a queer theorist writing several years into her own terminal illness, at a moment when, in the United States, it was becoming possible to understand oneself as "living with" AIDS rather than dying from it—I want to suggest that Sedgwick's formulations are not without precedent, that the canon of American literature contains within it remarkable portraits of communities whose unity—and whose sense of collective agency—is predicated precisely on shared terminality. And so let me now turn to an object of study which, in one noted scholar's words, "in its isolation and decay gives off a luminous but pathetic (if not terrible) beauty—the flush of dying,"[36] in another's, is simply "old and dying,"[37] and in a third's, is "full of relics of an earlier prosperity, but now . . . [is in] decline."[38] These critics are Warner Berthoff, Ann Douglas (Wood), and Richard Brodhead, respectively, and their shared topic is a terminal being not human but rather cultural and

geographic: the towns and ways of life portrayed in American literary regionalism. More specifically, all three refer to Dunnet Landing, the setting of Sarah Orne Jewett's 1896 work *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the text to which I will turn for much of the space that remains.[39] Regionalism has frequently been treated as a genre of the terminal, by the terminal, written for the sake of those who will survive or remain. Clinging to a fading way of life, the narrative goes, the authors of regional fiction seek to preserve in writing the traces or "remnants" of a culture that, however rich its past, has little in the way of a viable future. In *Resisting Regionalism*, Donna Campbell argues that in its emergence "after the Civil War, a time when '[t]he country's internal regulation of younger men and women to new urban areas has left behind a ghost world of spinsters, widows, and bereft sea captains,' local color fiction celebrates the preservation, through writing, of the lives of humble, ordinary people in an environment threatened by time, change, and external disruption."[40]

Critical responses to regionalism's terminality, which read characters' response to cultural loss in terms reminiscent of our conventional response to environmental loss, have tended to go in one of two directions: either highlighting the texts' intense nostalgia for a bygone era, or asserting that writing itself—like the acts of gathering and canning that characterize daily life in Dunnet Landing—is a gesture of preservation that attempts to combat the passage of time. My aim is not to challenge the assumption that Dunnet Landing's economy, community, and characters are largely terminal, but rather to challenge the assumption that gestures of preservation, saving (this time in the sense of safe-keeping), and mourning are the only acts that can be taken under such circumstances. More specifically, I aim to demonstrate how Jewett's portrayal of a spinsterly, elderly, terminal mode of persistence —the intransitive lasting of characters who seem to be dying and ways of life that seem to be dying out—in fact more often involves forms of terminal community and middle agency, in keeping with Sedgwick's account, than the insistently transitive paradigms of saving and preserving to which many critics of regionalism have been committed for more than half a century. As I will demonstrate, Jewett's narrator's practice of befriending a terminal town (and its multiply futureless residents) offers a model for our practices of reading a terminal genre and inhabiting a terminal condition, just as Dunnet Landing's queer modes of persisting come to index regionalism's own.

As the quotations from Berthoff, Douglas, and Brodhead already have begun to suggest, to reach the town of Dunnet Landing, one must first find the ontological crack between the living and the dead. That *Pointed Firs* can be read as a geography of, or queer guidebook to, such terminal regions becomes clear relatively early in the text, when the narrator hears the story of a mythologized landscape "way up north beyond the ice" "where there was neither living nor dead," and which seemed "a kind of waiting-place between this world and the next."[41] The tale of the waiting place emerges via multiply embedded paradigms of decline; in the immediate wake of a funeral, the eccentric seafarer Captain Littlepage, who "wasn't what he had been once" (13–14), visits the narrator at the schoolhouse where she writes, and begins lamenting the "terrible loss" (20) of the seafaring economy and the way of life it entailed. He then narrates one particular adventure at sea, his experience of being shipwrecked near Parry's Discoveries, where, amidst his own "dreary waiting" for rescue, another captain, Old Gaffett, who "wa'nt going to live a long while" (23), shared his encounter with the waiting place, whose "fog-shaped" and "flitter[ing]" and only partially legible inhabitants—more "shapes" than "folks" (25)—manage simultaneously to allegorize Jewett's characters, setting, and genre, all of which can be read as already in the process of disappearing.

In a 1959 article insisting upon regionalism's futurelessness, Berthoff dismisses Littlepage, Gaffett, the waiting place, and Dunnet Landing in a single gesture, deeming the northern landscape "simply an old man's hallucination, yet also a fable of the ungovernable anonymous forces which have closed the village off from life and the world. This fearful mid-world is what those who go out from a Dunnet Landing must enter; good reason then to choose to stay home—even though it must be to wither and stiffen in a setting which, in its mild and permissive way, is only another kind of mid-world, half way over to death" (44). But far from being a site of *rigor mortis*, as Berthoff's imagery of "wither[ing] and stiffen[ing]" suggests, the waiting place of Dunnet Landing offers a model of terminal life, demonstrating what becomes possible when the narrator learns to "perceive, think, feel" at the "speeds" and "frequencies" of the "bardo of the dying."[42] For what precipitates out of the waiting place chapters is not death but, improbably, friendship. After the narrator listens to Littlepage's story, and after Littlepage fixes his eyes on the schoolhouse's map of North America, looking unsuccessfully for a trace of those regions, the two of them part,

“the best of friends” (29). That Captain Littlepage is, in Nir Evron’s reading, a paradigmatic “remnant figure” of regionalism, a character who, as a “living relic,” embodies the paradoxical condition of “living obsolescence,” means that, here, the narrator is, in McKibben’s terms, “attach[ing] herself to [the] remnants”—and not so reluctantly at that.[43]

Such intimacy with remnants is, uncoincidentally, also internal to the project of reading regionalism, this futureless genre that, in Robert Spiller’s words, “can have no heirs.”[44] Once again, there emerges a queer homology between a practice of reading and a practice of relating—for the best way to learn to read the genre to which *Pointed Firs* belongs may be to heed its narrator’s practice of befriending a town and a population at its last. “‘Step in some afternoon,’” Captain Littlepage says to the narrator, “as affectionately as if [she] were a fellow ship-master wrecked on the lee shore of age like himself” (29). Here, the narrator—an outsider to the terminal space-time of Dunnet Landing—becomes intimate with one of its weathered residents via the metaphorical shipwreck of age. While the “as if” calls into question the extent of her actual vulnerability, this encounter ultimately proves a model for her other burgeoning friendships, all of which rely on her fully inhabiting the temporal and relational logics of this terminal region. And by the end of the book, her practice of terminal befriending transforms her relationship to herself, much as transpires across Sedgwick’s body of work. In the final chapter, approaching the conclusion of her summer visit, she reflects: “so we die before our own eyes; so we see some chapters of our lives come to their natural end” (131).

Whereas Brodhead argues that regionalist fiction “[memorializes] a cultural order passing from life at that moment” (120), *Pointed Firs* itself—as the narrator’s intimacy with her own “natural end” begins to indicate—eschews a concern with permanence and monumentality. The book is pervaded by a thematic, tonal, and narratological attention to the temporality and affects of the seasonal visit; its narrator, after all, is not a Dunnet Landinger, but a summer visitor, and the entire plot of *Pointed Firs* —such that one can even be said to exist—is predicated on a series of loosely linked visits, both between the narrator and the region’s denizens, and among those denizens themselves. In this, the text subtly introduces what we might deem an ethics of temporariness, an attention to what it means to persist and dwell together with an awareness of the fact that such

relations are transient. Across scales—from individual encounters characterized by their fleetingness to the "growth" of the narrator's "true friendship" with Dunnet Landing, a dying and diminishing place (2)—the narrative limns the contours of befriending in and at and through endings.

It is as she prepares to leave her landlady's house as the summer comes to its close that the narrator equates her departure to a kind of death: "When I went in again the little house had suddenly grown lonely, and my room looked empty as it had the day I came. I and all my belongings had died out of it, and I knew how it would seem when Mrs. Todd came back and found her lodger gone. So we die before our own eyes; so we see some chapters of our lives come to their natural end" (130–131). Although the temporariness of the visit is not explicitly compared to the temporariness of a lifespan elsewhere in the book, much attention is paid to the fact that the present visitor will at some point be absent. Near the end of the narrator's visit to Green Island, when the narrator expresses a wish that she "'could be here some Sunday evening,'" Mrs. Blackett responds that "'William an' me'll be talkin' about you an thinkin' o' this nice day'" (51). And, later, Mrs. Blackett prefaces another optative statement—"'I want you to come again'"—with a comment that not only inscribes the narrator's imminent absence but also places the current visit already in the realm of retrospection: "'I shall like to think o' your settin' here to-day'" (54). In a culture whose prevailing actions are indeed those of remembering and storytelling, the fact that the visitors are there at times matters less than the fact that they *will have been there*, that the actions and conversations of the day will be available to retrospect. And yet the tonality of this future anterior rarely feels nostalgic; rather, the gestures of turning back are always intertwined with and predicated on the unpredictability of what is to come, of the indeterminate and fundamentally unknowable context of that ever-prospective "will." There is always an interplay, in other words, between embrace and relinquishment, between holding on and letting go. Stanley Cavell has deemed nostalgia "an inability to open the past to the future"; *Pointed Firs*, by contrast, opens the future to the past.[45] As stories of bygone moments become the ground for present-tense friendship and intimacy, they open themselves to remaking and serve as the ground upon which relation is negotiated again and again.

Indeed, even what seem in *Pointed Firs* like the most straightforward moments of nostalgia, or like insistent gestures of preservation, often end

up proving that the past itself is not a static or closed entity that can be carried into the future. The character most frequently deemed nostalgic by *Pointed Firs* readers and critics is Elijah Tilley, the retired seafarer who keeps his home as a kind of museum of or memorial to his life with his wife, the Poor Dear, who has been dead for eight years. In his own words, "none on 'em [the Dunnet Landingers] thought I was goin' to get along alone, no way, but I wa'n't goin' to have my house turned upsi' down an' all changed about; no, not to please nobody. I was the only one knew just how she liked to have things set, poor dear, an' I said I was goin' to make shift, and I have made shift. . . . I do miss her . . . Folks all kep' repeatin' that time would ease me, but I can't find it does. No, I miss her just the same every day'" (121). Whereas the lack of (or even resistance to) change evident in Elijah Tilley's home and emotions and syntax alike suggest a staunchly preservationist bent, a slightly later moment in the scene complicates this model by acknowledging that the past is not always identical to itself, that it is open to renegotiation and available for surprise. When Tilley takes the narrator into Poor Dear's best room, he points to a shallow cupboard and says:

> "That's real chiny, all of it on those two shelves . . . There never was one single piece of it broke until—Well, I used to say, long as she lived, there never was a piece broke, but long at the last I noticed she'd look kind o' distressed, an I thought 'twas on account o' me boastin'. When they asked if they should use it when the folks was here to supper, time o' her funeral, I knew she'd want to have everything nice, and I said 'certain.' Some o' the women they come runnin' to me and called me, while they was takin' of the chiny down, an' showed me there was one o' the cups broke an' the pieces wropped in paper and pushed way back here, corner o' the shelf. They didn't want me to go an' think they done it. Poor dear! I had to put right out o' the house when I see that. I knowed in one minute how 'twas." (124–125)

Tilley's words may call to mind Sedgwick's reparative reader, who, "because [she] has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, [can also] entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened

differently from the way it actually did" (*TF* 146). In a kind of inverse of this formulation, Tilley, by granting that the past itself is open and contingent, may in turn train us (and the narrator, and his fellow Dunnet Landingers) how to live within a terminal present. For if the terrain of one's own history is not steady but steadily uncertain, if retrospect yields not a verifiable fact but merely an informed conjecture, and if the past, in keeping with the language of the passage, slips from an entity one "knew" and "knowed" to an entity one could only "guess," then our neat division between nostalgia and anticipation may no longer hold. The past and its apparent endings, in other words, function as a space of possibility; in Dunnet Landing, characters must consistently reckon with and engage the persistent uncertainties of what already has—and what already *hasn't*—come to pass.

The important role that non-fruition plays in Dunnet Landing becomes clear throughout the scene with Elijah Tilley, as the narrator passes the afternoon with him by keeping watch for Poor Dear, who will, of course, never appear:

> "You set down here in this chair, then you can look off an' see the water. . . ."
>
> . . . We were both silent for a minute; the old man looked out the window, as if he had forgotten I was there.
>
> "You must miss her very much?" I said at last.
>
> "I do miss her," he answered, and sighed again. "Folks all kep' repeatin' that time would ease me, but I can't find it does. No, I miss her just the same every day. . . . I get so some days it feels as if poor dear might step right back into this kitchen. I keep a-watchin' them doors as if she might step in to ary one. Yes, ma'am, I keep a-lookin' off an' droppin' o' my stitches; that's just how it seems. I can't git over losin' of her no way nor no how. Yes, ma'am, that's just how it seems to me."
>
> I did not say anything, and he did not look up. (120–121)

In this scene, as throughout *Pointed Firs,* an interest in the future gives way to a keen attention to the complex dimensionality of the present, and the

forms of companioning that emerge therein. Over the course of their time together, Tilley and the narrator share an objectless watch, looking not *for* an entity that would confirm, conclude, or otherwise justify their practice but instead "off" and "up" and "out" at a vista that remains as seemingly consistent or continuous as Tilley's life, where patterns of mourning persist "just the same" every day.[46] Within this paradigm, the future can modify the present adverbially but is never itself substantialized in noun form, never itself emerges or arrives. The most important modifier throughout the passage is the capacious "as if": Tilley keeps "watchin' them doors" not *for* his wife's arrival but instead "*as if* she might step in to ary one." The adverbial *as if* inscribes a sense of possibility into the present, even though —or perhaps precisely because—it is a possibility divorced from any potential for fruition. In Elijah Tilley's sitting room, as throughout Dunnet Landing, the unrealized—and the unrealizable—presses on, modifies, and even shapes the present; Jewett writes in a syntax where "*what is*" (to return to Sedgwick's formulation) is always put in relation to what did not and will not come to pass. Her adverbial attention makes legible a present where non-fruition is allowed to persist as such, where the path from present to future—or from one sentence to the next—nearly always passes through what could have been, nearly always allows us to sense what the present as future has already failed to become. In the process, it once again indexes the unexpectedly expansive dimensions—temporal and spatial—of this terminal region; as Sedgwick reminds us, compared to the way things "actually did" happen, "[t]he realm of *what might have happened but didn't* is . . . wider and less constrained" (*TF* 151).

What emerges from this place of dilated watching—much as emerged from the narrator's earlier encounter with Captain Littlepage via a place of dilated waiting—is friendship; before she leaves Tilley's house, they "laugh together, like the best of friends" (127). And the ground of this friendship is less what the narrator does than how she lets herself recede; in a manner reminiscent of the "most passive and minimal of performances" involved in Sedgwick's account of working with the dying, proof of the pair's burgeoning intimacy emerges in Tilley's ability to persist in his watch, "as if he had forgotten [she] was there." Throughout *Pointed Firs*, the narrator's process of befriending the Dunnet Landingers requires her to inhabit a zone of ontological liminality between presence and absence, animacy and inanimacy, that characterizes life in their terminal region.[47] Indeed, among

the book's most compelling and revered characters are Tilley's "Poor Dear" and Dunnet Landing's "Poor Joanna," both long dead; they remain not only in the form of others' stories about them, but also as participants in ongoing interactions. As we've already seen, Tilley spends his days keeping watch for Poor Dear, and one of the central episodes of the book is the narrator's pilgrimage to Poor Joanna's island, which feels as much like a "visit" as do her encounters with the town's living residents. Not only do these characters (and the narrator's intimacy with them) exemplify the possibility of befriending across the ontological crack, but their very names indicate the blurring of bounds that happens in that inhabitable space. For who, exactly, is Poor—Tilley's wife, for having lost the world, or the world and Tilley, for having lost her? The answer, of course, is both; "poor" becomes as much a name for the change (not rupture) that death has brought to relation as anything else. Further, not only do the dead often feel as vibrant as the living in Dunnet Landing, but the living are often described in terms of—and praised for their resemblance to—inanimate objects. When Mrs. Todd's old friend Mrs. Fosdick returns to Dunnet Landing for a visit, the narrator is granted access to their conversation because of her object-like status; as she reflects, "I soon grew more or less acquainted with the histories of all their fortunes and misfortunes, and subjects of an intimate nature were no more withheld from my ears than if I had been a shell on the mantelpiece" (59). And in a famous praise song to Mrs. Todd, the narrator describes her as looking "grand and architectural, like a *caryatide*" (30, original emphasis).

As these stony intimacies already begin to suggest, Dunnet Landing also models alternate affective registers in which to navigate terminal regions. For the *Pointed Firs* characters' relationship to the endings that characterize their living is not only open, but also affirmatively muted, insistently calm, and importantly slow. Whereas Stephanie Foote, one of those who argues for *Pointed Firs* as an intensely nostalgic text, suggests that "amid even the slow cadences of life in the village, the narrator manages to impart a sense of urgency about her own project of collecting and arranging folklore and folkways," we might instead take the text on its own terms, and read it within its own lexicon.[48] For if we examine the slow cadences and tonality and pace of *Pointed Firs* sketches themselves, and carefully read their thematic and structural treatment of the way things end, what we can't help but notice is a kind of attention to how things pass, and to how—amidst

such passing—other relational and ethical possibilities emerge. As day begins to fade to evening on Green Island and the sea winds begin to change, Mrs. Todd simply "[nods] reassuringly and [keeps] to her steady plod, not quickening her gait" (50). In emphasizing Mrs. Todd's plodding gait, and the non-plussed stance of the elderly Dunnet Landingers in the face of their individual and collective terminality, I mean neither to adopt a fatalistic attitude toward harm or suffering, nor to imply that a cataclysmic end is inevitable and that we should simply develop forms of stoicism and kindness to occupy as we wait. In fact, quite the opposite: I want to suggest that by acknowledging such endings as a temporality that we already inhabit, rather than that we are working to prevent, we might find our sense of possibility expanded rather than delimited. By understanding endings less in terms of crisis, rupture, and radical discontinuity than in terms of a kind of perpetuity or *steadiness* (a word, borrowed from Jewett, that has both temporal and affective connotations), we might no longer be paralyzed —or intermittently mobilized—by fear, may no longer feel as if we are working to prevent the deeper catastrophes (or produce the better futures) yet to come. If instead we avow the myriad continuities between past, present, and future (even [or perhaps especially] if that continuity, as in the example of Elijah Tilley, takes the form of a common unknowability), we might be better equipped to inhabit our complex agency—and respond to the need for ongoing responsibility—when confronted with the realities of environmental degradation.

Attending to the fact that both terminality and responsibility are ongoing, it seems, might also help us more readily embrace the fact that both, too, are shared. Lest we still think, after all of this, that memorialization and monumentality are *Pointed Firs*' privileged modes, it's worth remembering Mrs. Todd's insistence, when discussing Poor Joanna's hermitage on Shell-heap Island, that "'a growin' bush makes the best gravestone'" (68). For Mrs. Todd to comment on the utility of plants is not unusual; beyond being the narrator's landlady and friend, she is also Dunnet Landing's resident herb gatherer, the one to whom local residents turn for the kind of medical wisdom not offered by the town's doctor. Just as the gathering of pennyroyal at one important juncture brings the narrator into a newfound intimacy with Mrs. Todd, the herbs—and herb gathering—that play such a central role in *Pointed Firs* more generally become the ground of social relation in the community. It is illness, in other words, that brings people

together—that connects Mrs. Todd's "kind, motherly voice" to the "anxious voice at the door speaking of a sick child," that gives the narrator "a warm sense of comfort in the evident resources of even so small a neighborhood" (73). In an anticipatory echo of Sedgwick's model of terminal friendship, it is through vulnerability that the Dunnet Landingers establish community. And these connections are cyclical, even perennial.[49] Mrs. Todd's work is, we might argue, less salvific than reparative; her remedies are not permanent cures but temporary balms, holding damage at bay rather than precluding it once and for all. Indeed, the townspeople's stance toward terminality is not one of refusal or repression but rather of gentle acknowledgment; when the town's doctor sees the elderly Mrs. Blackett on the road to the Bowden family reunion, he clutches her wrist, feels her pulse, and proclaims: "You're wearing well: good for another ten years at this rate" (89). If the experience of the Dunnet Landingers as they move through the rigors of life on the Maine coast is one of *wearing*, then Mrs. Todd's skill is to modify that verb adverbially, to ensure that they are *wearing well*; she does not halt the process of aging or decay, but rather changes its tonality, alters the experience of the trajectory if not the trajectory itself. (It might be worth noting here that pennyroyal, the plant around which the narrator's most intimate excursion with Mrs. Todd centers, is best known as an abortifacient. It is this herb designed to preclude the bringing of life that brings the narrator and Mrs. Todd to an unprecedented level of closeness.)

What brings regional communities together, ultimately, is an intimacy with death, a fact that has been used to bolster a critique of regionalism as politically regressive. In the inaugural issue of the journal *Women's Studies*, for instance, Ann Douglas Wood argued that "in the last analysis, [the regionalist writers] were corpse watchers. They were half in love with what it was their fineness to know were rotting timbers and bare and beautifully bleached bones: impoverishment was the legacy they left."[50] Where this formulation makes corpse watching a symptom of the demise (and fruitlessness) of this particular literary mode, we might consider instead how corpse watching can be the occasion for intimacy, can bring people together amidst situations where saving is not an option and yet modes of ethical relation are constantly being unspooled. For not only is corpse watching precisely the practice dramatized and celebrated in Jewett's 1888 short story "Miss Tempy's Watchers," in which two women befriend each

other as they keep watch over the body of their mutual friend on the eve of her burial, but the deathbed is also a privileged or defacto setting of much of the queer literature written in the final decades of the twentieth century, a body of work to which this project will frequently return. Indeed, we might see the kind of terminal community that regionalism exemplifies, and thus catch a glimpse of how regionalism lasts, at the bedsides of people with AIDS (PWAs) as portrayed in queer literature and theory. The question these texts force us to consider is not whether there will be corpses to watch, or whether we will—at one juncture or another—find ourselves watching them; rather, regionalism urges us to acknowledge that saving is not the only way to make things better, or to make life—however long it lasts—livable, viable, and meaningful. And so we might find in literary regionalism an important model for a non-salvific model of care, for a set of practices that manages to understand stewardship outside the rhetoric of saving, and to cultivate forms of communal and planetary commitment that persist outside—or *beside*—the temporality of "futures" in which environmental(ist) politics routinely invests.

"Into Something Larger": Death Doulas and the Terminal Present

> "[W]e can Doula each other into something larger."
>
> —Alexandra Juhasz, in *What Does An Uprising Doula Do?*

As this chapter moves toward its own end, there likely persists a question of scale, as the terminal practices that I have outlined may seem too humble to make a significant difference in the context of our current environmental predicament—especially when we try to scale the ethics of deathcare (which, like the practice of close reading, so often involves small and quiet and insistently local gestures) outward to the forms of institutional and structural change that climate catastrophes demand.[51] Indeed, those who have already suggested that we rethink environmental stewardship in terms of palliative care lend credence to such a concern, often operating in a spirit of resignation and understanding "hospice" to index the modesty of their goals. E.E. Demore, for instance, writes that "[p]alliative care is not about quitting. It is about committing to improving the quality of this life, right

now, in small, concrete ways. . . . So, I will embrace a palliative approach to living in the Anthropocene: one which aims small, which focuses on comforting my immediate world, my school, my street, the ravine behind my house."[52] Guy McPherson, meanwhile, writes that, for environmentalists, "[i]t's time to pursue hospice, with as much honesty, integrity, and compassion as we can muster. . . . The time for blame has long passed. The time for shaming others has long passed. No blame, no shame: At the edge of extinction, only love remains. Let's pursue hospice as one expression of our love."[53] Such arguments, almost despite themselves, seem to capitulate to the status quo, forgive or forget the forms of institutionalized violence that have brought us to this point, lament the fact that it is too late for consequential change, and narrow the terms (and affects) of ethical relation. Here, attention at the scale of the daily or the local—Sedgwick's "*what is*"—involves a retreat from the greater world, a burrowing into an understanding of the self as a bounded, proprietary subject and a model of action that revolves around individual choice. The scene of planetary dying, and the practice of care attending it, is inhabited via entirely privatized and personal logics, and, consequently, is evacuated of its political promise. As opposed to understanding palliative care as a site of potential change, such accounts risk reifying and stabilizing the very conditions that have precipitated environmental harm.

But there is, within the history of deathcare, an extant alternative, one that refuses to disentangle ameliorative practices from the possibility of social transformation. The work of death doulas—and their queer kin—demonstrates how the terminal present, far from simply marking a foreclosure or an end, can also become a space in which to embody the world we wish to bring into existence. Indeed, the very term "death doula" indicates the non-reproductive possibilities that can be birthed via practices of terminal care—including the possibility of the structural change that our moment so urgently demands.

Death doulas, who provide non-medical forms of support across dying's *longue durée*, companion the terminally ill—becoming, in one account of the practice, a dying person's "last friend"[54]—in a way that is simultaneously impersonal, insofar as it is not predicated on pre-existing affiliation or affinity, and collective, insofar as it understands itself to be part of a broader movement to remake the experience of living and dying

alike. A mode of impersonal friendship, of short-term commitment, of improvisational deliberateness, death doulaing embraces and embodies and mobilizes the apparent paradoxes at the heart of its name. Although the death doula movement as such emerged only in the early 2000s, its work echoes the earlier practices of queer terminal care that have been stitched throughout this chapter, most of which—by design or by necessity—are extra-institutional, burgeoning in response to what existing structures (the state, the medical establishment, the family, etc.) cannot or will not offer.

And such work has, in recent years, become a model for a range of other practices of companioning, advocacy, and care. According to the What Would an HIV Doula Do? collective, a doula is "someone in community who hold[s] space for others during times of transition. For us, HIV is a series of transitions in someone's life that does not start with being tested or getting a diagnosis, nor end with treatment or death."[55] Similarly, in their co-edited 2020 manifesto "Introduction: What Does an Uprising Doula Do?," collective members Abdul-Aliy A Muhammad and Pato Hebert write: "We understand a doula to be someone who holds space for others during times of transition. In our rage and resourcefulness, our conviction and our care, we hold space for the transition that an uprising might be."[56] As these brief definitions begin to suggest, doulaing understands individuals as fundamentally collective beings: a doula is not only "someone in community" but also does the work of "hold[ing] space for others during times of transition." And such transitions—despite, or precisely because of, the fact that they are iterative—remain unpredictable and non-teleological ("the transition that an uprising *might be*"); the posture of the doula is thus one of responsiveness and flexibility: "A doula can offer reassurance and rest, replenishment and release. A doula dances with uncertainty, admits to not knowing. A doula is a formation, a praxis, an action, an opportunity to give and to grow. Solidarity and love are doulas." "Doula," much like "queer," proves to be a grammatical chameleon: a noun and a verb, a subject and an object, a being and a mode of being, an individual and a collective. Doulas facilitate movements and transitions, but these movements (like their attendant affects and relational configurations) are themselves doulas, shepherding change into the world.

One such form of change is temporal, as doulas reimagine the scale both of nominally bounded events and of the forms of response that they

demand. Whereas hospice care is often bureaucratically punctual and structurally autonomous, beginning only after a terminal diagnosis has been proffered, and only after other forms of care have officially been withdrawn, the work of a doula engages nominally discrete "events"—including birth and death, diagnosis and illness—in their distension or dislocation, a shift that also alters our proprietary relationship to them. Says Martez Smith in What Would an HIV Doula Do?, "learning that you are HIV+ is a series of events over a lifetime . . . I knew at a young age I was gay and based on what was being shown to me on TV I concluded in my mind that I would become HIV+. Delivering that first test result confirmed that."[57] In this account, where a stranger's diagnosis confirms one's own eventual seroconversion, and where the process of living with HIV begins long before contracting the virus, we see a transpersonal model of care, one that manages to reread vulnerability as the province of lifespans and communities, while never losing sight of the way in which local scenes and individual bodies so often themselves necessitate attention and response. In other words: doulaing proves to be simultaneously intensely personal and fundamentally transpersonal, acute and protracted, immanent and visionary, caring for the body as it is and for the world as it could be.[58]

Indeed, insofar as the work of doulaing has migrated from the experience of birth to the experience of death, and, in turn, has extended across the lifespan, engaging diagnosis and illness, pandemics and uprisings, gender transition and abortion, it has become a paradigm for how we companion and support each other and ourselves. Doulaing reminds us that we are the midwives of each other's possibility, that (in keeping with the principles of abolition) we collectively steward the endings of unjust institutions in part by enacting the forms of care and community—and hence embodying the world—that will replace them. The scale of this may seem small, unfolding day by day, but the work is collective and collectivizing, and the goal is substantial: to remake the very structures in which we live our lives and our deaths, in which we relate to ourselves and each other. In short, this movement understands "to doula" and "to companion" and "to befriend" as verbs with immense political potential, and as fundamentally necessary to the structural transitions that our socioecological circumstances demand. It reveals "the everyday role that we all play in creating the world we need and want through being a doula for each other, for ourselves, and for the systems we live within and under."[59]

In so doing, death doulas insist that terminality—and the forms of local, intimate palliative care that it entails—is hardly incommensurate with large-scale political action. Members of the various doula collectives referenced above reject the false choice between making things better for individuals and catalyzing structural change, in part because they not only facilitate, but themselves catalyze, transitions. The work of doulaing itself becomes a way of shuttling back and forth across scales; reflects AIDS activist and filmmaker Alexandra Juhasz on the possible work of an uprising doula amidst the quarantines of COVID-19: "Might it be the Doulas' very function to support, guide, and inspire this transformation from necessary and deserved states of our small holed-up being into practices of collective action and insurrection?" As she insists: "we can Doula each other into something larger."[60] The faith in such possibilities seems inseparable from the fact that many of these doula collectives are made up of long-time AIDS activists, for whom the process of tending to the dying and grieving the dead remains inseparable from the process of acting up in their memories and their names. The practices that these collectives envision and enact—HIV doulaing, COVID-19 doulaing, uprising doulaing—thus index the lasting of AIDS activism and the terminal care of the 1980s. In the process, they understand death less as exceptional event than as the protracted condition of living, and also understand the practices of deathcare as extending across lifespans and communities, offering an ethic for how to live care-fully in perilous and precarious times. Here we might return to Michael Lynch, and his "thirty or so friends," who, as Sedgwick recalls in "White Glasses," "organized a care team" that enabled them to companion him twenty-four hours a day as he neared his death of AIDS-related complications (254). As Sedgwick reflects, the forms of care and empowerment that this collective offered "turned out to have been . . . not only among the many gifts from the people who love Michael, but a part of Michael's legacy to himself from two decades of activism, writing, and what can only be called the work of community" (254). A project of daily steadiness that is also a daily project of worldmaking, the scene at Michael's bedside exemplifies the reciprocal relationship between care for the self and care for the other, between living in community and dying in community, between tenderness and action, that remains at the heart of doulaing today.

Ultimately, the embodied rhythms of doulaing instantiate Sedgwick's argument in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading"—in which the reparative posture, and its seeking of pleasure and amelioration, is hardly opposed to the process of working for social and political change.[61] When Sedgwick, seemingly anticipating the critiques of political quietism that would come her way, asks "What makes pleasure and amelioration so 'mere'?" (144), she is insisting not simply that these are themselves worthy goals, but rather (or also) that the reparative possibilities she theorizes are structurally inseparable from the paranoid modes of knowing that have been codified as "criticism" (and, perhaps, "activism") as such. Indeed, the paragraph in which she poses her only partially rhetorical question begins with a discussion of the fundamental intertwinement of paranoid and reparative practices: "Another, perhaps more accurate way of describing the present paranoid consensus, however, is that rather than merely displacing, it may simply have required a certain disarticulation, disavowal, and misrecognition of other ways of knowing, ways less oriented around suspicion, that are actually being practiced, often by the same theorists and as part of the same projects" (144). The paranoid posture and the reparative posture, the project driven by exposure and the project driven by amelioration, the expansive practices of transformation and the local practices of care, shelter within each other and rhythmically interdigitate. It is surely no coincidence that it is at the bedsides of PWAs—and in the scenes of social transformation stewarded by those who have lingered and worked precisely there—that we see an enactment of this interdigitation. For here we feel the fullest fruition of reparative reading as a practice of terminal befriending, and terminal befriending as a practice of reparative care.

To consider engaging in palliative—or reparative—practices at the scale of planetary loss is thus neither to excuse institutionalized forms of environmental harm nor to abandon the possibility of significant structural change, just as, for death doulas, the task at hand is neither to care in a way that absolves institutions nor to attend to structures in a way that obscures the embodied, affective experience of individuals' transitions. Rather, it is to embrace terminal care as a steady practice, or a practice of steadiness, one that insists upon collective forms of relation and enables us to doula ourselves and each other athwart the present and into something larger—

including, importantly, into the structural reconfigurations that our planetary circumstances demand.

2

Grammars of the Unrealized

Lost Causes and Subjunctive Possibilities in Willa Cather

On August 4, 2018, *The New York Times* devoted the entirety of its Sunday magazine to a single article: Nathaniel Rich's "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change." Half elegy for the near-misses of 1980s environmental lobbying, half meditation on why "human nature" leads us to act against our own best interests, the article (like the book into which it was developed) foregrounds, insofar as it is built upon, a convention in environmental discourse of late: attention to the consequences of what failed to happen in the past. In the animation that accompanies the online version of the article, the title and byline are followed by three stark statements, each of which flashes atop images of present-day environmental cataclysms:

> "Thirty years ago, we had a chance to save the planet.
>
> The science of climate change was settled. The world was ready to act.
>
> Almost nothing stood in our way—except ourselves."[1]

The article that follows limns what failed to happen between 1979–1989[2] so as to take stock of what can't fail to happen now (or, to borrow Rich's own language, to think through the fact that "much of the damage that might have been avoided is now inevitable"). In other words, it traces what could have happened, but didn't, so as to account for a future we could have avoided, but now can't. This is, for Rich, how we lose earth; for readers,

encountering his devastating account of missed opportunities, it can also be how we lose hope.

Such concern with political and legislative failures has become even more prevalent in popular environmental discourse since Rich's book was released, in part because of the sense that COVID-19 offered yet another opportunity to make large-scale structural change. Proclaimed a September 2020 CNN article: "The pandemic gave the world a golden opportunity to fix the climate crisis. We're about to waste it."[3] In December 2021, a *Time* magazine headline asked: "Did We Just Blow Our Last, Best Chance to Tackle Climate Change?"[4] The same month, *WIRED* magazine transposed the lost-cause logic of Rich's 1980s into our present moment: "The pandemic should have been a wake-up call—instead, emissions have climbed once more. Here's how the US could have seized the opportunity."[5] We might notice here not only the vertiginous shifts in tense—as the late 2020 "about to" slides into the late 2021 "did"—but also, and more interestingly, the way in which the indicative, the mood in which we talk about what is, gives way to and is overshadowed by the subjunctive, the mood in which we talk about what "could" and "should have been." That the history of climate change is coming to read as a history of such missed opportunities—as a story that must be written in the past subjunctive—makes the genre alternately urgent and elegiac (or, perhaps, urgently elegiac). For it is possible to read these pieces as implicitly composed in the imperative mood: such accounts exist so as to insist that the next opportunity, if and when it arises, must not be missed. But it is also possible to read them as yet another kind of "game over" lament—an account of how we so wildly failed to do what once could have been done.

I borrow the phrase "game over" from Donna Haraway, whose practice of "staying with the trouble" seeks an alternative to two problematic responses to the Anthropocene: "a comic faith in technofixes" and the countervailing "position that the game is over, it's too late."[6] She argues that the latter posture is facilitated not only by the belief—as we saw in Chapter 1—"that only if things work do they matter" but also, and "worse, only if what I and my fellow experts do works to fix things does anything matter" (4). Such an orientation may be responsible for the nihilistic tone that pervades these accounts of "wasted opportunities." For the past subjunctive that Rich and others narrate feels doubly inaccessible,

tormenting us with missed chances that hover out of reach amidst our declining present. Even more remote than what was is what could have been—those "old futures" that never came to be.[7] Especially in the context of a crisis that demands bold action, it seems hard to respond to a history of failures with anything other than what Haraway has deemed "sublime despair" (4).

This chapter offers an alternative to such logics—and their attendant affective consequences—found within the archive of queer literature, where what remains unrealized is so often not (only) a political project but (also) queer life itself. Whereas these articles lamenting missed opportunities often treat the past and its failures as lost causes,[8] queer literature traces the persistent presence, effects, and vitality of impossibility itself, taking seriously what it means to live in—and move forward through—the wake of all that failed to happen in the past. More specifically, I turn to Willa Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House*—the insistently non-futural narrative of an insistently non-futural protagonist—and trace what I deem Cather's "grammar of the unrealized," a way of inscribing formally—within the very medium of narration—how a queer present is shaped by all that the past failed to become. In her formalizing of the unrealized, I argue, Cather charts in the structure of her language a course between what Lisa Lowe has deemed "the world that is and the world we might have made."[9] In so doing, she demonstrates the surprising relevance of unlived queer lives to the quandaries of the environmental present. For while environmentalist hope founders in the gap between the indicative and the subjunctive, queer literature, I aim to show, renders that space the ground of narration, of intimacy, and even of life itself.

In making such an argument, I am offering the grammar of the unrealized—and the mode of queer formalist reading through which it becomes legible—as an addition to the repertoire of practices that scholars have developed to demonstrate how the residual potential of the past not only persists, but also can be reactivated. These thinkers both recalibrate the tense and mood of possibility—predicating *what could be* less on *what is* or *what was* than on *what could have been*—and model the practices of reading, writing, and historiography that make the past's elided, foreclosed, and illegible possibilities "present anew."[10] Whether Ariella Azoulay's "potential history," which "develop[s] a new model for writing history"

(and reading photographs) in order to "reconstruct[] . . . unrealized possibilities, practices, and dreams that motivated the actions of various actors in the past" (565), Lowe's "past conditional temporality," which "symbolizes a space of attention" in which it is possible "to give an account of the existence of alternatives and possibilities that lay within, but were later foreclosed by, the determinations of the narratives, orders, and paradigms to which they gave rise" (175), Elizabeth Freeman's erotohistoriography, which engages the "undetonated energy" of the past that can be "mined" in the present,[11] or even Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of reparative reading, which enables its practitioners to "entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past . . . could have happened differently from the way it actually did,"[12] such approaches insist upon the non-inevitability of what is while also intervening in "the politics of knowledge that gives us the received history of our present" (Lowe 173). In order to pursue such projects, these scholars develop readerly and historiographical methodologies that aim to bring unrealized and forgotten possibilities back into legibility; potential history, for Azoulay, is "an effort to create new conditions for the appearance of things" that were "disrupted by the constitution of a sovereign regime that created a differential and conflictive body politic" (565), just as Lowe's past conditional readings "suggest[] that there were other conditions of possibility that were vanquished by liberal political reason and its promises of freedom, and . . . suggest[] means to open those conditions to pursue what might have been" (175). In so doing, they seek not only to account for the political forces that foreclosed possibilities (often in such a way as to render them unthinkable or unimaginable in the present), but also to "reverse" or "unravel" or "intervene in" the naturalized persistence of such forces and their modes of knowledge production.

In taking as my material for a complementary line of inquiry not the absences or obscurities of the colonial archive, as do Lowe and Azoulay, but rather the pages of a literary realist work itself imbricated in colonial histories, I mean to draw out connections between theories of alternate history and Andrew H. Miller's account of the "lateral prodigality" of realist literature, its necessary recognition that characters could have led other lives. "[T]hat such counterfactual imaginings were built into the realistic novel as a part of its very structure"[13] makes realism a (or even the) privileged genre of a subjunctive imagination—a mode of possibility that,

rather than being straightforwardly futural, derives its energy from the persistent presence of all that could have been.

Somewhat strangely—especially given that his project's epigraph, "One's real life is so often the life that one does not lead," is drawn from the work of Oscar Wilde—Miller laments that he "thought [he] would write more about sexuality, but . . . found less than [he] expected."[14] But perhaps a clue to that apparent aporia is found in Wilde's own logic, for unlived queer lives often feel less *counter*factual than uncannily extant, a companionate presence in a daily reality so often characterized by capitulations to normative imperatives. The "real" of queer realism, in other words, often dwells precisely in what failed to happen, or in what failed to become. As scholars from Jack Halberstam to Heather Love have convincingly and movingly demonstrated, queer culture long has been not only intimate with but also predicated on failure and impossibility, and has transformed both into an affirmative "art." And such arts, in turn, become a way of noticing—and "staying with"—the unrealized possibilities that are still and already here; "as a practice," Halberstam writes, the queer art of "failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant."[15]

Likewise, in Cather's queer rendering, unlived lives, far from being simply counterfactual (Miller's "how things might have been but were not"), both condition and remain embedded within "real lives" led. Cather's linguistic experimentation embodies Miller's argument that unlived "lives trouble the way language ordinarily works—trouble our pronouns, our diction, our syntax, the tone and cadence of our phrases,"[16] while in the process also making legible how what "might have been" in fact still *is*. By carefully wielding the interplay of grammatical moods, Cather traces how the possibilities of what Peter Coviello deems "strayaway" intimacies—affiliations that don't resolve into relational identities—persist, even (or perhaps especially) within lives that seem to hew strictly to the norms of taxonomized sexuality. In the process, a notoriously apolitical (or antipolitical) writer unexpectedly offers a way of integrating the work of "unravel[ing] the sexual cultures that . . . make us up" with the work of "unravel[ing]" the ongoing histories of settler violence that animates the projects of thinkers like Lowe and Azoulay.[17]

The relevance of the queer unrealized extends, too, to questions of literary history. For the question of how alternate paradigms of desire

persist shapes the lives not only of queer characters, but also of the literary modes in which they appear. In turning to Cather, whom Michael Reddy has described as a "modernist in nineteenth-century clothing,"[18] I am turning to the tail end—the twilight[19]—of literary regionalism. While Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse periodize regionalism as lasting from 1850–1910, they conclude their anthology with Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris," published in 1932. The resulting conundrum—that Cather lives beyond the end of regionalism's viability as a collective endeavor, becoming in some respects the literary mode's last surviving specimen, its own "endling"[20]—is attributable at least in part to both the author's and the mode's relationship to codified sexuality. Explain Fetterley and Pryse: "Cather appropriately concludes this anthology because she signals the beginning of a different historical moment from that which produced regionalism. A nineteenth-century phenomenon and in part the fruit of the nineteenth-century women's movement, regionalism did not survive either the repression or the redirection that movement witnessed at the beginning of the twentieth century. While Jewett could live openly and unselfconsciously with Annie Fields in a 'Boston marriage,' Willa Cather became a woman in a Freudian context, self-conscious about her own attraction to women and aware of her deviance."[21] In Cather's late work, then, "we see [her] . . . announcing the 'end' of regionalism as a viable mode for the women writers of her generation" (595).

As we shall see, however, Cather gently dilates this "end" even as she announces and inhabits it, demonstrating how pre-sexological modes of friendship, affiliation, writing, and reading persist well into the twentieth century. At the same time that Cather is famously "backward" (to invoke both her preface to *Not Under Forty* and Heather Love's influential study), a term often taken to index how she has "turn[ed] [her] back[] on the future,"[22] her relationship to regionalism as a mode also indicates her interest in the possible lasting of a rapidly fading or eroding past. For 1925 saw the publication of not only *The Professor's House*—the story of a middle-aged professor whose life seems to be lived almost exclusively in and through the past—but also the edition of Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* that Cather compiled. In the introduction to that volume, simultaneously an argument about the terms of literary valuation and a tribute to the lasting of a friend and literary mentor who had died sixteen

years earlier, she famously argued that the sketches of *Pointed Firs* embody "persistence, survival"; are "living things" and even "life itself"; and offer "a message to the future."[23] (In)famously, while writing from the literary mode's deathbed, she prophesied for Jewett's work "the possibility of a long, long life" (xviii). That this future for literary history seems not to have come to pass is, here, part of the point; in the final section of the chapter, I will return to the relationship between the unrealized possibilities of characters and the unrealized possibilities of the literary modes in which they appear.

"The moving was over and done"; or, Life, Unrealized

The Professor's House, the story of Godfrey St. Peter, a professor of colonial history in the small Midwestern college town of Hamilton, opens in the aftermath of seemingly everything that normally propels emplotment and narrative futurity: the arc from youth to adulthood; the journey through courtship and marriage; the making of a successful career and a moderately satisfying family life. The book, which Cather deemed her "middle-aged novel,"[24] begins "The moving was over and done"[25]—a line which refers not only to the St. Peter family's physical transition out of their longtime home, but also to the exhausted stasis that has consumed the titular professor's existence.[26] Godfrey St. Peter is exhausted because he is aging, because he is tired of the politics in his department and at his university more generally, because, both as a historian and as a middle-aged man, he has "put a great deal behind [him]" (142). He is exhausted because he has, for many years, been living "two lives" (19)—personal and professional—and experiencing "two romances" (234)—a romance "of the heart" with his wife and a romance "of the mind" with Tom Outland (234), his beloved former student who died young at war, and whose absence is the Professor's most intimate companion. He is exhausted, too, in the sense that he has exhausted the capacities of his profession, of heterosexuality, and of the bourgeois nuclear family themselves. As we learn early in the novel, "he had burned his candle at both ends to some purpose—he had got what he wanted" (19). Indeed, he is, in a virtually literal sense, burned out, the "fire" in his eyes and his capacity to be "kindled" both diminished by the passage

of time (5, 19). He spends much of his time in his attic study, often lying on a couch whose sagging springs are “like the sham upholstery that is put in coffins.” But if that simile suggests the promise of rest, it remains only figural; the Professor’s plight involves the question not of how to die but rather of how, however minimally, to live on. With the “moving over and done,” with the books published and the children raised and the prizes won, with the reprieve promised by retirement and death a still distant horizon, like the swath of Lake Michigan blue that he can only barely see through the small square of his attic study’s window, it’s not clear how either he or the novel itself can manage to go on. But go on he—and, more importantly, *it*—does, lasting 258 pages across three sections. As it traces a course from stasis through a near-death experience understood as an “accidental extinction” (258), *The Professor’s House* is propelled neither by the promises of the future, nor by the rhythms and structures of literary plot, but rather by the protagonist’s ongoing relationship to (and increasing intimacy with) all that the past failed to become.

The energy of the unrealized emanates primarily from Outland, who is not only the book’s preeminent absent presence, but also the figure whose legacy animates much of the novel’s conventional “action,” such that any can be said to exist. He is, to put this another way, the novel’s *lost cause*: In addition to being the Professor’s student, confidante, intimate friend, and travel companion, he also was engaged to St. Peter’s daughter Rosamond. While passionate about history, Outland made his mark in physics, and upon his death, the rights to a lucrative patent that he developed transferred to Rosamond, now married to—and living in opulence with—her husband, Louie. The book unfolds in three sections: the first, titled “The Family,” is crowded with details about domestic life, focusing specifically on the entanglements among St. Peter and his wife Lillian, Rosamond and Louie, and a second daughter, Kitty, and her husband Scott, a college friend of Tom’s. Many of the familial tensions involve the characters’ competing claims to and investments in Outland’s legacy. The first section concludes when the entire family, save St. Peter, leaves Hamilton for a summer trip to Europe. St. Peter stays behind, choosing to linger in his attic and garden and to devote himself to the task of editing Tom’s journals, which narrate the formative experience of the boy’s short life, a summer spent on a New Mexican mesa, where he simultaneously made a home and excavated Indigenous “relics” with a friend, Roddy Blake. The second section of the

book, “Tom Outland’s Story,” renders Tom’s first-person narration of that time in his life—not as he represents it in the journals that the Professor seeks to edit (which, indeed, never themselves appear in the text *as text*), but as he conveyed it to the Professor upon their initial meeting. The final section, “The Professor,” is by far the briefest, and returns to the Professor’s life itself, detailing the passive, desultory course of his summer alone. The book concludes when, upon receiving a letter from his family announcing their imminent return, he retreats to his office to lie down, and nearly asphyxiates when the window blows shut in the wind, leaving him sleeping in an attic room rapidly filling with gas from the finicky stove that heats the space. He soon wakes up but decides not to take action to save himself; he later is saved, however, when discovered by Augusta, the family’s spinster seamstress, who has come to the attic to do her own work. The near-death experience, we’re told in the book’s enigmatic final paragraph, has allowed St. Peter to “let something go”; although he expects to meet his family with apathy, he feels newly able to do so. “He thought he knew where he was,” the novel’s last sentence tells us, “and that he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* [their ship] and the future” (258).

The oddities of the book’s unfolding have received immense critical attention, and I am hardly the first to notice the extent to which both it and the Professor are shaped by the unrealized promises of the past. Doris Grumbach, for instance, argues that the novel (which she deems Cather’s “masterpiece”) is “a book about despair and aging, the misery of a marriage in which all passion is spent, the trials of family life, the ugly face of ambition, and the deep sadness of a love that *has passed away without ever being realized*.”[27] Heather Love, invested as she is in the bad affects of the backward, lingers with a scene in which, together at the opera, Godfrey and his wife Lillian confess their shared desire for a shipwreck that would have ended their marital life before it even began. She argues that whatever connection Godfrey manages to maintain with Lillian is thus “circuited through *lack*: what brings them together is what they did not have (shipwreck) or might have had (shared death) rather than anything that they might actually share in the present (children, domestic space, the presence of the other)” (82, emphasis mine). For both critics, what failed to happen in the past is experienced wholly as absence or lack, and productive solely of sadness, longing, and elegiac lament. Indeed, as that latter turn indicates, in these readings, Godfrey’s relationship to the unrealized is inextricable

from death—whether the stillborn queer love between professor and student that "passed away without ever being realized" or the aging married couple's unrealized desire for early death itself. However, perhaps the most remarkable thing about Cather's quite remarkable novel is how she manages, both grammatically and characterologically, to render the unrealized an affirmative, embodied, queerly shaping presence—the constitutive force in the Professor's life both as it is and as it could have been.

Scott Herring finds the novel's approach to non-fruition similarly affirmative. Exploring "how passionate male friendships in Cather's work *fail to materialize* into urban homosexual subcultures" (67, emphasis mine), he uses the intimacy between St. Peter and Tom Outland as his paradigmatic example of a relationship that "resists the historical march from same-sex friendship to codified homosexuality" (67) and "fracture[s] the historical shift from passionate same-sex friendship to discernible homosexual (or, for that matter, heterosexual) identity" (70). Another way to describe this fractured shift or resisted march might be as the achievement of continuity with the pre-sexological nineteenth century, something the characters manifest by being, like Cather herself, "rather uninterested in the novel formations of modern identity" (69)—a formulation whose affective register again recalls that of Thoreau on his deathbed. But Herring's compelling analysis in turn raises a question: How do we write the narrative of what "fails to materialize" or of everything that shapes our lives precisely by not happening? How do we account for what persists precisely by remaining unrealized? And how, finally, can we (or Cather) write the unrealized without ourselves realizing it? We might notice that despite Herring's admirable commitment to critical restraint, to modeling a reading practice that doesn't push the characters to resolve into identities and instead celebrates a failure to materialize as an affirmative textual (and historical) value, his own rhetoric is ultimately insistent upon resolving the characters' intransitive tendings into transitive (and recognizably political) ends (as in the rhetoric above of "resists" and "fracture[s]," which are joined in his essay by a cavalcade of "refuses" and "wrecks").[28]

Cather's own approach to formalizing the unrealized becomes most legible near the end of the novel, in a simultaneously moving and perplexing scene that narrates the arrival of an unexpected visitor who also

happens to be a former self. As he loafs around Hamilton, cultivating “a novel . . . dissipation” while his family is away in Europe on summer holiday, Godfrey rekindles his friendship with a lost boy: not Tom Outland, but someone else, “the boy the Professor had long ago left behind him in Kansas, in the Solomon Valley—the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter” (239):

> This boy and he had meant, back in those far-away days, to live some sort of life together and to share good and bad fortune. They had not shared together, for the reason that they were unevenly matched. The young St. Peter who went to France to try his luck, had a more active mind than the twin he left behind in the Solomon Valley. After his adoption into the Thierault household, he remembered that other boy very rarely, in moments of home-sickness. After he met Lillian Ornsley, St. Peter forgot that boy had ever lived. . . . The man he was now, the personality his friends knew, had begun to grow strong during adolescence, during the years when he was always consciously or unconsciously conjugating the verb “to love”—in society and solitude, with people, with books, with the sky and open country, in the lonesomeness of crowded city streets. When he met Lillian, it reached its maturity. From that time to this, existence had been a catching at handholds. One thing led to another and one development brought on another, and the design of his life had been the work of this secondary social man, the lover. . . . Because there was Lillian, there must be marriage and a salary. Because there was marriage, there were children. Because there were children, and fervour in the blood and brain, books were born as well as daughters. (239–240)

In this remarkable passage, which sees Godfrey being visited by the materialization of what Miller would deem his “unled life,” we encounter at least two forms of the unrealized: the life that Godfrey had meant to live as, and share with, his younger self,[29] and the paradigms of self-actualization that this younger Godfrey, who has now so queerly re-emerged, managed to avoid: “He seemed to know, among other things, that he was solitary and must always be so; he had never married, never been a father” (241). Which is to say: what remains queerly unrealized in this work of queer fiction is

not only homosocial intimacy (whether between Tom and Godfrey or Godfrey and his boyhood self) but also the very possibility of remaining in an unrealized state—the possibility of not growing up and settling down, of not resolving the promiscuous affiliations of the verb "to love" into the codified and nominalized and socially sanctioned identity of the (marital) "lover."[30] But here, in the "twilight" of St. Peter's life (239), in a moment when he relinquishes the forms of realization foundational to his normative maturation and cultivates instead an affirmative capacity *not to*, the Solomon Valley twin wanders into the garden, making the possibilities rendered illegible by adult life, to again evoke Azoulay's redolent phrase, "present anew" (553).

Although there is much more to say about this unrealized self, I want to focus for the time being on the unexpected incursion of grammatical terminology in the lyrical account of the boy's disappearance from St. Peter's life. For casting the turning point from youth toward normative heterosexual romance as a matter of "conjugating the verb 'to love'" reminds us, first, that conjugation is a term that means not only "to inflect a verb in its various forms of voice, mood, tense, number, and person" but also "to yoke together, to couple" and suggests in turn that the existence for which St. Peter longs—and which does in fact inhere as a kind of companionate (un)reality to his daily existence—is unconjugated in both of these senses. Relatedly, the fact that he expresses the momentum of adulthood in terms of a syntax of inevitability ("Because there was, there must be") implies that his wish is to opt out of the "life sentences" (by which I mean the actual sentences in which we tell the story of a life) that take such a form. One way of understanding the impetus of my own reading, then, is to ask how the text makes Godfrey's unrealized life stories and relational possibilities legible precisely as and through non-normative grammars. What alternatives are there to the life sentences that St. Peter so passively resists? What is there to do with the verb "to love" other than to conjugate it? How does Cather write the stories of characters who sidestep conjugation in its various forms? And how might the answers to such questions allow us to return to the failed promises of the environmentalist past, and engage the lingering of unrealized opportunity anew?

To begin, let's return to the unexpected arrival of that younger self. That Godfrey St. Peter can be "unmodified" means that his ideal self—which is also, somehow, his ideal companion—may be understood as a noun (in the

absence of adjective) or a verb (in the absence of conjugation). I suggest such a possibility not to make an absurd claim (indeed, much of the emotional power of Cather's text comes from the aching humanness of St. Peter, from the way in which he is very much a man) but rather to indicate the way in which, in *The Professor's House*, characters are themselves affiliated with temporalities or tenses or moods befitting parts of speech, and thus make specific life grammars possible for one another. Lillian, memorably, is "so occupied with the future" (78) that Godfrey is shocked to learn that she, too, has harbored fantasies of shipwreck. The Professor, by contrast, is constituted by retrospect: not only through his professional work as a historian, but also insofar as he "[has] put a great deal behind [him], where [he] can't go back to it again" (142) and feels "tremendously tired" as a result. But where Lillian embodies the future tense and Godfrey the past, both Tom and the Solomon Valley St. Peter seem to dwell in a realm beyond the customary bounds of English tense.

Sam Bakkila has argued that Cather, who taught Latin to Pittsburgh high school students at the turn of the twentieth century, was "thinking in Latin" while composing *The Professor's House*, a fact that shapes his own reading of the text's conditional and counterfactual possibilities.[31] Indeed, following Bakkila, we might note that when Tom first arrives in St. Peter's life, a tramp boy fantastically emerging out of nowhere, he must pass through two gates: first, the "green door that led [to the garden] from the street" (95) and then a spontaneous Latin exam, ostensibly meant to demonstrate his readiness to matriculate at the university. But this inaugural aligning of Tom's "manly, mature voice" (95) with Virgil's lines also indicates the extent to which the young man's role in St. Peter's life is hard to articulate not only within our conventional relational terminology but also within our normative grammars. For as Tom recedes further into memory, he comes to seem "*not very real* . . . any more," a fact that leads his friend (and St. Peter's son-in-law) Scott to wonder whether he ever was, or if he was in fact always just "a glittering idea" (94). And yet, despite—or perhaps precisely because of—that unreality, Tom remains the central figure in St. Peter's life and is the condition of possibility for so many of the relationships that transpire in Hamilton. He is an *is* and a *was* and a *could have been*; he is a *former future* son-in-law and a *never lover*; he is the scent on a horse blanket and the namesake for an opulent estate and the author of a journal being prepared for publication. He could have been, and

indeed remains, to adapt Jim Burden's famous statement about Ántonia in Cather's *My Ántonia*, "anything that a man can be to a man," his failure to resolve permanently into any of his prospective roles making him (again, much like Ántonia) less the codified object of relation than something more like a figure for relation as such.[32] And when we seek language for how Tom manages to be without being, how he manages to linger both as a present absence and as a spectral "could have been," we might heed Bakkila's reminder that Latin's is a grammar more capaciously subjunctive than that of English;[33] as classicists reflect, "in the Latin language, there is a soft line of demarcation between Fact and Irreal," far less of a commitment to distinguishing between what is and what failed to materialize, or what never came to pass.[34] And Latin is itself ontologically complex, a dead language that persists within (and conditions the possibility of) the words of daily life. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that in *My Ántonia*, Latin becomes for Jim a source of "curious survivals," indexing the way that certain facets of his "old life" are "waiting for [him] in the new" (292).

But we are not all Latinists, nor does Cather expect us to be, no matter how deeply the specific restraints and affordances of Latin grammar may shape her writing and her imagination. When the young Godfrey returns to St. Peter's life, we begin to glimpse how English itself makes space for the lingering presence of the unrealized. For let's recall the moment at which we learn what St. Peter had once dreamed he could do with (and as) this unmodified self: "this boy and he had meant *to live some sort of life together* and *to share good and bad fortune*." We might note here that when we dare to speak of all that we wished for—especially when it was not realized—we reach for the infinitive, for the verb in its unconjugated or unmodified state. Indeed, at the pivot point from "Tom Outland's Story" to the final section of the book, "The Professor," we learn about the plans that Tom's decision to go to war cut short:

> To this day St. Peter regretted that he had never got that vacation in Paris with Tom Outland. He had wanted *to revisit certain spots with him: to go with him some autumn morning to the Luxembourg Gardens*, when the yellow horse-chestnuts were bright and bitter after

> rain; *to stand with him before the monument to Delacroix* and *watch the sun gleam on the bronze figures* . . . (236, emphases mine)

As he lingers with the alternate reality of trips never made, St. Peter asks us (as much through his sorrows as his possibilities) whether it may be possible to dwell just there, to remain in and with and as the infinitive, to inhabit a queer grammar, to acknowledge (with Oscar Wilde) the unrealized as the realest life we have. We might note, in the service of unpacking such a possibility, that infinitives have no tense and thus extend in perpetuity. As in Azoulay's model of potential history, the infinitive's in-finitude announces "the past [as] an unending event, . . . what Benjamin has called incomplete history" (565); Godfrey's infinitive past, like Lowe's past conditional, is neither "fixed" nor "settled," but rather "open" in, and to, and within, the present in unpredictable ways (175).

It is precisely this confounding of linear, bounded, progressive time that renders the infinitive a poetic resource for tracing, or inhabiting, the way that the past persists in the present, wielding its force in recalcitrant, oft-illegible ways. Cather thus uses the infinitive to index the way in which the unrealized possibilities of the past dwell within, and condition, the lived present just as the infinitive verb dwells within, and conditions, the conjugated ones that animate our days and our understanding of our "own" stories. If part of the aim of alternate history is (in Azoulay's words) to recapture the "existence of possibilities that lay within, but were later foreclosed by, the determinations of the narratives, orders, and paradigms to which they gave rise," then how better to limn such a process in language than through the infinitive, which continues to dwell within, even after being eclipsed by, the determinations of the conjugated verb—and the conjugal life—that it enables?

Of course, as my scare quotes around "own" begin to indicate, infinitives complicate not only the finite temporalities but also the finite subjectivities of conjugated verbs. For an infinitive is a verb that belongs to no subject. No one can claim an infinitive. Perhaps that is the other reason why such a mood[35] aptly represents St. Peter's desires. Indeed, St. Peter is a man who feels burdened by the claims that others can make over him, and who prefers to make as few claims as possible in return. One of the first things that we learn in *The Professor's House* is that the house is not actually the

Professor's (in the sense of ownership), but that, in part for that reason, he prefers it to the more conventionally comfortable home that he recently has purchased. The "old" house is precious to him perhaps for the same reason that Tom is: his relationship to it does not "follow the laws of society" and is not "based on property"; because, indeed, "there [is] no material *clause* to it" (50, emphasis mine). Although St. Peter tries to absent himself from proprietary claims, such conflicts swirl around him: the unifying angst of the book's social milieu involves the status of Outland's patent, and who can lay claim to its fiduciary fallout. In a moment that anticipates the discussion of "the verb 'to love,'" St. Peter responds to his daughter Rosamond's shopping spree by asking, plaintively, that the family "omit the verb 'to buy' in all forms for a time" (134). And in "Tom Outland's Story"—the queer double to, or lining of, the frame narrative of the Professor's adult life—imperialist and capitalist profiteering is explicitly cast in terms of realization. As Tom recalls of his friend Roddy Blake's decision to sell the relics they have "discovered" on a southwestern mesa: "Rodney explained that he knew I cared about the things, and was proud of them, but he'd always supposed I meant to 'realize' on them, just as he did, and that it would come to money in the end. 'Everything does,' he added" (220).

Rather than lingering with claims in the legal sense, we might (for the purposes of this argument) use St. Peter's resistance to proprietary structures to lead us back to an underemphasized complication of *The Professor's House*: that it's not always clear whose story it is—or, more precisely, that it's not always clear what it means for a story, including a biography, to belong to any individual. The most famous thing about the novel is its interrupted (and interruptive) structure; at the center of the tale of St. Peter's adult *ennui* is Tom Outland's first-person account of his time on the mesa, a narrative in which the Professor himself plays virtually no role—except as its audience and perhaps also its scribe. This story, a regionalist or local color sketch which not only features the evocative descriptions of landscape for which Cather is deservedly famous, but also depicts, to borrow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase, the "gorgeous homosocial romance" between Tom and Roddy, is the "turquoise set in the dull silver" of the chapters that bracket it, the trajectory of the book serving, famously, as the narrative analog to the bracelet that Rosamond wears in memory of Tom.[36] *The Professor's House* thus might be said to raise the

following provocation: What are we to do when the most important event in our own life in fact happened to someone else? What if the centerpiece of our own story can hardly be said to be *ours* at all?

Such paradigms of surrogate relation, of course, also animate Rich's article, which forces us to consider how to live in relation to historical events—actual or possible—that are not "ours" to experience or intervene upon directly, but which shape our lives and stories in irrevocable ways. Such surrogated relation—with its dawning awareness that we may not always be the subject of the most important (non-)events in our lives—may also be understood as a way of de-coupling, or unconjugating, the self from what befalls it; in other words, happenings happen to, but aren't the property of, anyone—including the subject by which they're conjugated as verbs (as the typical language of experience suggests). The life sentence is always subject to new conjugation, reminding us that the indicative verbs that express who we are and what we do can do that work only because the infinitive—with its subjunctive possibilities—queerly lasts within them.

But it also may be the case that there is—as Godfrey's experience begins to indicate—no clear or easy distinction between our own life and the life of another, insofar as we are always, consciously or not, intimate with all of the others who dwell within. In a book where the claims that we hold over others are vexed from the outset, the appearance of the unmodified St. Peter throws the very distinction between self and other into crisis. For, ontologically and relationally speaking, who (or what) is this Kansan boy? [37] It first seems that this boy is simply a younger self, a kind of chrysalis or shed skin that St. Peter comes across in the garden during one of his bachelor summer nights. But then we learn that the boy was not only a self but also somehow St. Peter's first betrothed: "this boy and he had meant, long ago. . . ." This ambiguity of self and other extends into the boy's reappearance, which unfolds in a paragraph itself rich with grammatical oddities:

> The Kansas boy who had come back to St. Peter this summer was not a scholar. He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. He was not nearly so cultivated as Tom's old cliff-dwellers must have been—

> and yet he was terribly wise. He seemed *to be* at the root of the matter; Desire under all desires, Truth under all truths. He seemed *to know*, among other things, that he was solitary and must always be so; he had never married, never been a father. He was earth, and would return to earth. When white clouds blew over the lake like bellying sails, when the seven pine-trees turned red in the declining sun, he felt satisfaction and said to himself merely: "That is right." Coming upon a curly root that thrust itself across its path, he said: "That is it." When the maple-leaves along the street began to turn yellow and waxy, and were soft to the touch,—like the skin on old faces,—he said: "That is true; it is time." All these recognitions gave him a kind of sad pleasure.
>
> When he was not dumbly, deeply recognizing, he was bringing up out of himself long-forgotten, unimportant memories of his early childhood, of his mother, his father, his grandfather. (241, emphases mine)

If the unmodified Godfrey St. Peter (and/or his companionship) is the original *unrealized*, then it's worth commenting at least briefly on the language that attends his return. First, we might note the prevalence here of *unmodified* nouns, the stark simplicity and concreteness of the boy's interest in "earth and woods and water." Then we might wonder after the seductive repetition of the syntax that follows ("sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed"), which replaces our customary prop "it" (in the familiar locution of "it rained") with a kind of redundancy that not only suggests a return to a kind of unmodified or even Edenic essence (why is there rain if not to rain, or sun if not to sun?) but also verbalizes the nouns in turn. There is the life narrative predicated on the unrealized; the boy is defined by the fact that he "he had never married, never been a father"; indeed, his very being seems to embody the temporal infinity of the infinitive: "he was solitary and must always be so." A similar kind of perpetuity inheres in the insistently biblical utterances with which the passage concludes, their simple predicate structure seeming to gesture not simply to the local referents to which they implicitly point but also to a series of eternal truths: "That is right," "That is it," "That is true; it is time." And if these para-biblical lines include familiar impersonal pronouns, then less familiar and more surprising is the way in which "he," too, becomes impersonal—or transpersonal, the pronoun for the kind of plural biography of which I have been speaking, and cipher for a

narrative arc that courts the lingering presence of the unrealized. For who (or what, or when) is this "he"? At the start of the paragraph, it seems to refer unequivocally to the boy who has returned. At the end, it seems possible (though certainly not obligatory) to read it as once again referring to the adult Godfrey St. Peter. But between? Between we have a "he" that somehow lingers between being singular and being plural, between the frozen past of the boy and the static present of St. Peter and the infinitive space ("to be," "to know") that they can perhaps tenuously share. Between, St. Peter seems to have become (or finally embraced) a self that is no more simply "him" than the narrative trajectory of *The Professor's House* is simply "his own." (Perhaps this is one way of accounting for the fact that, as Grumbach claims, *The Professor's House* "impresses the mature reader as dangerously threatening to his own self-possession."[38]) For this "he" is both adult St. Peter and the unmodified boy, merges his "is" and his "was" with the boy's "never"s and with Tom Outland's "could have been"s, embodies both the weight of all that came to pass and the presence of all that failed to be.

* * *

What Cather's queer novel makes legible, then, is that the unrealized possibilities of the past not only can be reached from the present, but are in fact still here—embedded in the syntax of our sentences, lurking within our bodies, taking the form of all those versions of ourselves that we have forgotten and nominally left behind. We are all, that is to say, in intimate, daily, corporeal, linguistic relation to what failed to happen in the past, a fact that—if hardly sufficient on its own to make structural and political change—is also hardly insignificant. In insisting that the past conditional is not remote but intimately proximate, and in acknowledging it as the condition of possibility for everything from our sentences to our relationships, Cather also shows us how to invite our unrealized pasts to reappear. For St. Peter's Solomon Valley twin returns at the moment when he for the first time inhabits a "twilight stage," enjoying a "half-awake loafing with his brain as if it were a new sense, arriving late, like wisdom teeth" (239). Here, in a scene of queer self-companioning ("loafing with his brain") rife with intransitive verbs, where—as in my account of terminality—betwixtness (neither self nor other, neither living nor dead, neither awake

nor asleep, neither fully active nor familiarly passive) becomes the site of (re-)emergence, Godfrey cultivates a Sedgwickian "art of loosing" that renders legible all that his realized life has obscured. Here, in Azoulay's words, he "create[s] [the] conditions . . . for the appearance of things" (565). Dwelling within what Sedgwick has called the "middle ranges of agency," he finds a way to keep company with his forgotten former self, and its unrealized possibilities.

And here the environmental(ist) predicament with which we began may finally return. For as a complement to the (typically transitive) grammars of direct action, which involve subjects acting intentionally and punctually on objects (a problem, a social circumstance, the world) in the name of futural goals, Cather's infinitives, open as they are to new configurations, offer a way of relating to those practices' historical failures, and of reactivating their lost promise in the present. Indeed, as the impersonal nature of the infinitive reminds us, what failed to happen belongs not simply to those present at the time but to us now—a fact that can engender not only "sublime despair" but also a queer sense of agency or possibility. The task before us thus may be to reconjugate the infinitives of the past provisionally in—and for the conditions of—our collective present, attaching them to and detaching them from various subjects, allowing them to gravitate toward, and pull back from, various objects of attention, inviting them to inhabit—however temporarily—various tenses and moods. The infinitive, in other words, is the thread that stitches the relation between then and now, between "them" and "us," between what could have been, what is, and what still could be. It is the register in which we reckon with "arriving late" ("like wisdom teeth") and, like the twinned Godfreys, render that belatedness a ground of relation and ethics rather than solely a source of lament. The persistence of the infinitive—its in-finitude—also offers an alternative to the punctuality of intervention, permitting us to continue relating—and continue acting—even when the moment nominally has passed. As a fundamentally untimely—or, perhaps, fundamentally *atemporal*—mode, the infinitive embodies the possibilities that remain, is the grammar in which, in Freeman's words, we can begin to "catch[] up to what is behind [us]." Our ongoing relation to the "lost causes" of the past, Cather suggests, may appear not on the same grammatical plane in which we write our stories of futural action, but rather on the plane that

simultaneously recedes and persists within it, functioning as it does as its condition of possibility.

Ultimately, in both its form and its content, “The Professor” invites us to cultivate the habits of attention and practices of reading that enable lost potentiality to reappear. Such modes of engagement may enable us to access anew not only the missed opportunities that we know to grieve but also the “old futures” whose very existence has, in the parlance of regionalism, been “lost to sight.”[39] In other words: such infinitive relations promise to recalibrate our relationship not only to the possibilities that we know have receded but also, and more profoundly, to those that (like the boyhood Godfrey, who disappeared amidst the momentum of the Professor’s adult life) we have forgotten ever existed at all.

Realizing, Derealizing, Unrealizing: Colonial Historiography and *The Professor’s House*

With this, let me consider the way in which the text’s grammars of the unrealized can attune us to another set of possibilities stitched athwart the (critical) present, this time as regards the question of Cather’s politics. As yet, there may seem to be a tension at the heart of this chapter, insofar as I framed my analysis of a bourgeois novel by a white author often characterized as both conservative and nostalgic with the work of theorists whose navigation of non-inevitability counters colonial violence. Indeed, although the novel’s grammars of the unrealized formalize the persistence of Lowe’s and Azoulay’s forgotten or obscured or lost possibilities, they may seem to do little to engage the historical and material contexts in which these alternate pasts, and hence alternate presents, become (il)legible. However, to cast the link between the novel and the criticism as purely formal, or as somehow only analogical, is to overlook one of the most complex—and most critically vexing—dimensions of *The Professor’s House*: its apparent comfort, and even complicity, with the settler colonial logics that its characters embody. In what follows, I suggest how Cather’s unwriting of Godfrey’s life sentences may also begin to unravel the practices of colonial historiography upon which he has predicated his professional career, and thus offer an alternate account of the text’s politics, one made legible by the practices of queer formalist reading.

If we return our attention to the start of the novel (when "The moving is over and done"), one way to understand Godfrey's predicament is that he has "settled": a term that, when my students inevitably use it in class discussion, suggests why fulfilling all the markers of heteronormative success (marriage and career and family and material comfort and . . .) has left him with such *ennui*. But this "queer" account of the book's inaugurating condition risks ignoring how settling—this time in the colonial sense—grounds not only "Tom Outland's Story," which narrates the "discover[y]" of "the city of some extinct civilization" (180), but also "The Family," which almost immediately links Godfrey's ability to purchase property (the new house into which he has reluctantly moved) to the success of his eight-volume imperial history, whose title—*Spanish Adventures in North America*—suggests its triumphalist tone. Insofar as the nuclear family is, itself, often a weapon of colonial discipline,[40] contemporary queer readers might hope that a novel that thematically dramatizes Godfrey's discontent with normative adult life and structurally propels "The Professor" out of "The Family" would disrupt, critique, or otherwise undo imperial logics. However, as many scholars—Christopher Nealon perhaps most astutely—have noted, the text's (and its characters') desire for queer forms of affiliation is often routed through, and predicated on, colonial fantasies; Cather implicitly contrasts the claustrophobia of the nuclear family to the Edenic glow of life on the mesa, where the homosocial purity of the "happy family" that Tom, Roddy, and Henry comprise is solidified by the presence of a mummified Indigenous woman named "Mother Eve" and the logics of property inheritance are supplanted by an imagined kinship with persistently absent "Indian" ancestors.[41] Far from intervening into colonial logics, that is to say, Cather's vision of queerness often instead seems to require naturalizing them.

But such a reading, I hope to show, is itself unsettled by the third book, both on its own terms and as it affects the shape of the novel as a whole. For the belated arrival of the boyhood self not only brings back unrealized possibilities, present anew, but also leads Godfrey to a near-death experience characterized as an "accidental extinction." The confluence of the boyhood Godfrey's uncanny persistence and the adult Godfrey's encounter with extinction complicates the question of who (or what), exactly, survives the novel, while the work of unwriting that the boy precipitates (or makes legible) complicates not only the teleological

narratives that the protagonist lives and composes but also the linear relationship among, and the collective coherence of, the novel's three sections themselves. Importantly, the non-futural, and de-developmental, trajectory of the book renders the final section less the culmination or synthesis of the two books that came before than the force of their undoing; as we shall see, "The Professor" unrealizes and unravels not only the protagonist's mature, "settled" family life but also some of the colonial fantasies with which it—like his professional life—is entangled.

The ongoing critical conversation about the novel's relationship to settler colonial practices often focuses on two linked moments in the text: Tom's act of claiming indigenous denizens of the mesa (featured on the page only in the form of relics, a mummified body, and apparently abandoned architectural structures) as "ancestors," and Godfrey's reunion with his younger self, a boy who not only is described as "a primitive" but who is, we are told, "not nearly so cultivated as Tom's old cliff-dwellers must have been" (241). And these two moments are inextricably tied to a third: Roddy Blake's capitalizing or "realizing" on the relics, an appropriative gesture that ecocritic Carolyn Dekker calls a form of "misbegotten profit"—a phrase that in her mind applies equally to Tom's appropriation of the makers of the relics as kin.[42] For Dekker, as for many readers, the problem with both acts is that they *de-realize* the actuality of indigenous survivance[43]—a charge that many readers have leveled, too, against Cather herself. Put differently, in order for "realization" (in either Roddy's capitalist or Tom's self-realizing sense) to take place, the "cliff dwellers" must be relegated to an immemorial past a "thousand years ago" (219) and treated as "extinct" (180).

But what, we might ask, is the relationship between this problematic of de/realization and Cather's interest in the *unrealized*—that is, in a grammar that indexes the *extance* of the past not (only) as it was but (also) as it never came to be, and that traces the persistent presence of historical possibilities imagined to be extinguished?[44] Whereas the work of de/realizing serves to sequester past from present, whether in the mode of an origin story or as the object of what Dekker calls "imperialist nostalgia" (429), the grammar of the unrealized instead traces how the past—as it was and as it could have been—persists, precisely as the condition for the present and what can be said within it. I want to suggest that by formalizing, in the grammar of the

unrealized, both the non-inevitability of the present and the non-extinction of the past, Cather makes space for her history professor protagonist to unwrite not only his "life sentences," but also, by implication, those *scholarly* sentences in which he has composed laudatory narratives of settler states.

In suggesting that the text's queer grammatical forms subtly unravel majoritarian historical narratives, I depart significantly from the conclusions of one of the most influential readings of Cather's novel: Walter Benn Michaels' 1995 book *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, which interprets *The Professor's House* as a fictional mirror-image of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act and its model of citizenship predicated on inheritance, not naturalization. For Michaels, Cather's nativism is articulated in her trifold engagement with Indigenous culture, classical languages, and homoerotic desire: the first two are ideologically deemed extinct, "dead and gone," and hence function as ideal guarantors of American culture; the last is a form of intimacy that, in not producing future life, can protect the family line, and hence the nation, from ethnic admixture. In his account, these conservative threads converge to produce a hermetic model of American identity/citizenship reproduced, isomorphically, in the pages of *The Professor's House*: "in Cather and Coolidge both," he writes, "identity is a function of inheritance, but what gets inherited is not just a biology, it's a culture."[45]

As strong as Michaels's case against Cather feels (and as influential as it has been), this charge of nativism relies on a strategic misreading of the forms of succession evidenced in the text. For not only does this account attribute to Godfrey a sincere investment in protecting "The Family"—the very relational configuration that the novel structurally propels him *out of* via its queer tripartite form[46]—but it also imputes a clear and stable relationship between past and present that Cather's formal inventiveness works assiduously to disrupt. In other words, to read *The Professor's House* as a work of "nativist modernism," as Michaels does, is to superimpose upon it a grammar of chronological inheritance that cancels out the past—or that reads the past as always already canceled and extinct—so as to birth a pure American identity.

While my understanding of Cather's project diverges from that set forth in *Our America*, I nonetheless linger with Michaels because I share his

sense that there is, in Cather's cosmology, a fundamental relationship among the three terms at the heart of his argument: same-sex (non-reproductive, non-conjugal, non-futural) intimacies, the question of extinction (whether via the "extinct" civilizations or Godfrey's brush with "accidental extinction" at the end of the novel), and the status of classical ("dead") languages. However, while Michaels aptly identifies the key *nouns* at stake in Cather's approach to questions of belonging and intimacy, he fails to consider the narrative and conceptual syntax in which they function. Indeed, where he reads Cather's text as parroting a triumphalist fiction of the American state—one where a nativist nation births itself via the derealization of "earlier" models of culture—my own reading of the novel, like Nealon's, understands the queerness of the text to shape its historiographic imaginary, and vice versa. For Nealon, the text is peopled by queer "foundlings" who, positioned outside heterosexual circuits of intergenerationality, desire to "feel historical," navigating the movement between solitary exile and collective experience via "hopeful analogies to other historical forms"—in Outland's case, the act of claiming unreal kin.[47] For Nealon, foundling texts reflect a specific experience of "historiographical struggle" that seeks to "find terms for historical narration that strike a balance between the unspeakability of desire, especially punishable desire, and group life" (13).[48] Such works, *The Professor's House* included, are thus defined by their askance relationship to historical narratives and narratives of history alike; they "seem too catachrestic, too counterfactual, too literal-minded or unsophisticated to merit full-scale integration into the story of how we come up with historical periods or theories of history" (22).

It is here that the younger Godfrey might return, both on his own terms and as a historiographic implication. Michaels reads the novel's final section as slamming the door on ethnic admixture and completing the work of naturalizing the nation form; he mobilizes the language of primitivism that appears in the description of this younger self to read an absolute correspondence between Godfrey and Tom. Just as Tom claims an "extinct" relative to realize a sense of belonging, Godfrey reunites with a "primitive" self to secure the purity of the family (and, by extension, the nation) at all costs. By replacing heterosexual reproduction with regressive homosocial self-relation, Godfrey, on Michaels's telling, develops a prophylactic strategy for protecting his family line from the contamination that

Rosamond's impregnation by a Jewish man supposedly represents. The nation and its origin myths remain triumphant. However, if the return of the younger self promises, as I have been suggesting, to unrealize the Professor's adult self, rather than to realize him as a father and progenitor, then so too does it promise to unrealize his professional status as an historian. That is to say, it matters that this younger self is not only a "primitive"—a term that does recall the personages in "Tom Outland's Story"—but also "not a scholar"—a phrase that invokes the writing, narrating, and theorizing of history. Indeed, we might observe that the syntax of inevitability that constitutes the Professor's fall into normative white heterosexual coupling—"Because there was. . . . there was. . . ."—also characterizes the teleology of imperial, and especially settler-colonial, accounts of history, including those which naturalize Indigenous dispossession. And yet Godfrey's work of *unwriting* his own life sentences formalizes a different relation between past and present, reintroducing the contingency of both and reminding Godfrey of the persistent presence of all that could have been, both personally and historically speaking. It is not, in other words, solely that the queerness of this foundling text disqualifies it from "full-scale integration" into majoritarian histories, but rather, or also, that queerness performs some of the work required to dis-integrate, dis-articulate, or unwrite them. And one of these histories may be "Tom Outland's Story" itself—a segment of the text that simultaneously contains Tom's narrative of his summer on the mesa and indexes the work Godfrey is doing in the summer of his family's absence: editing Tom's youthful journals for publication. In addition, then, to Tom's many other roles in the novel, he is also here the object of Godfrey's historiography; the dead boy's journals are the archive that the Professor is engaging in a desultory way as he cultivates his novel mental dissipation.

And so, whereas Michaels reads the final section of the book as culminating the work of imperialist derealization that many readers (Dekker, Nealon, and myself included) have glimpsed in "Tom Outland's Story," I instead read it as potentially *unrealizing* the models of whiteness, belonging, history, and temporality invoked there. With this, we may return finally to the queer echoes between the two scenes with which I began: Tom's practice of self-realization through intergenerational identification with the Indigenous past and Godfrey's reunion with his own "primitive" self, or encounter with the intergenerationality internal to his life. The

relation between these moments, despite (or perhaps precisely because of) their similarity, proves more complex than one of identity, replication, or succession. For where Michaels reads Tom's claiming of the extinct, mummified Mother Eve forward into Godfrey's relationship to the boyhood self, one might (inspired by Nealon's and Love's nuanced attention to Cather's backwardness) invert this order and read Godfrey's self-unrealization backward—both historically and diegetically—onto the scene on the mesa.

On this reading, when he appears, Godfrey's boyhood self is neither "imagined" nor "extinct" (Michaels's terms), nor simply a figure in a "dream" (Nealon's, 96), but *extant* in ways that index the persistence of the unrealized in a man who proves, ultimately, to be the boy's "relic" in the present. For this reason, the "accidental extinction" that befalls St. Peter at the end of the novel (and to which we will soon return) afflicts not the "primitive" boy (as Michaels argues) but rather the self-realized man, leaving to "face the future" a subject of ambiguous ancestry whose present tense—his life being lived—cannot be separated from its past conditional. What if the apparent "relics" of the "cliff-dwellers" serve a parallel function to the boyhood self, which is not that of precedence but of persistence? What, that is to say, if the presence of the Indigenous past *unrealizes* Tom's white Americanness as the unconjugated verb unrealizes teleological succession, and as St. Peter's boyhood self unrealizes the self-realized man? What, then, goes extinct? What, then, is born?

In rereading the novel in this way, I am not seeking either to exculpate Cather or to redeem her politics. Nor am I implying that a writer widely deemed conservative is, in fact, secretly radical. Rather, to return to my introduction's discussion of race and grammar, I am offering another way to understand the relationship between the text's approach to queerness (and, specifically, to queer form) and its approach to race. For discussions of Cather's queerness often revolve around her famous celebration of "the thing not named" in her 1922 essay on method, "The Novel Démeublé": "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it . . . that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself."[49] Whereas early queer readings of Cather identified lesbianism *as* the thing not named, more recent critics have identified the rhythm of naming and not

naming, like the experience of divining but not hearing, as itself somehow queer. In reflecting on his first encounter with Cather's prose, for instance, Jonathan Goldberg writes: "I found the writing intense, atmospheric, heavy with something that was not said which I nonetheless recognized. I couldn't tell what it was, aslant the calm surface of narration, that I heard. But whatever it was sounded along the wavelengths of a silence that I found irresistible."[50] My own reading of Cather, as we have seen, locates her queerness less in her themes or symbols or characters than in a dimension of the text that is indeed "felt upon the page without being specifically named there," that is often divined by the ear but not heard by it, that sits, precisely, aslant the calm surface of narration: her grammar. That said, the more I read Goldberg's words, the more they also seem to invoke another dimension of Cather's work that is everywhere upon the page without specifically being named there, that makes the writing heavy with something that is not said but that I nonetheless recognize: whiteness.

To make this point is not to suggest that Godfrey's race, like grammar, simply recedes. It is instead to argue that, in the queer grammaticality of *The Professor's House*, whiteness may stay unnamed, but, importantly, remains neither unheard nor unmarked. For Cather's necessarily non-proprietary infinitives call attention to, and subsequently unravel, the logics of not only the self-possessed white liberal subject but also the triumphalist imperial narratives that come to be deemed, simply, "history"—narratives that the adult *Professor* (perhaps like Cather herself) un-self-consciously repeats. In other words, Cather's grammar is itself telling a story that neither she nor her protagonist could have written. To say this is not to replace the 1925 book with a "better" one. Rather, it is to insist that both be read at once, the dialectic between them suggesting—once again in the register of the past conditional—what Cather's novel *could have been*. To consider how we might read the persistence of the unrealized novel, like that of the literary mode to which it belongs, let us now turn to the end of the text, where nominally extinguished possibilities find a way to "face the future," at last.

Spinsterly Lasting; or, Midwifing a Dying Future

In the final chapter of the book, having rekindled his intimacy with his boyhood self, having reinhabited the bachelor summers of his younger days, having finally harnessed the power of the unrealized, Godfrey learns that his family is returning early from their European vacation because Rosamond is pregnant. Deeply troubled not only by the sudden re-incursion of the demands of family life but also by how reproductive futurity threatens to re-conjugate the syntax that he has been unraveling, he lies down in his attic study and nearly dies when the wind blows shut the window of the gas-heated room. He is saved by Augusta, the spinster seamstress with whom he shares the space, and with whose patterns his own life's work had long been "interpenetrated" (13). After waking up to find her keeping watch over him, as she so often keeps watch at the bedsides of dying parishioners from her church, Godfrey realizes that he would rather have Augusta with him than anyone else on earth, and that while he feels no connection to his family, "[t]here was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (257). Ultimately, this scene of intimate proximity to both death and Augusta enables him to "let something go . . . something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably" (258). In the novel's final sentence, he decides that "he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future" (258)—the first and last time that we see him affirmatively turn his gaze toward what is yet to come. This famously enigmatic conclusion to a famously strange novel has yielded countless interpretations; here, however, I want to ask a question that draws together lines of inquiry from across the first half of this book: What kind of future does a spinster death doula midwife?

To answer this question, we might first pose another: Given that his life has been propelled by unrealized desires, and haunted by the present absence of Tom Outland, why would St. Peter "rather have Augusta with him just now than anyone he could think of"? Perhaps a preliminary answer dwells precisely in her spinsterliness. For Augusta—who "never married, never had a family"—can be read (in a quintessentially queer—and quintessentially Catherian—gesture of cross-identification) as the young Godfrey St. Peter all grown up, the version of that boy who never made the seemingly necessary compromises of adult masculinity;[51] she, like Tom Outland, "escaped all that" (237)—not by early death but rather by the unfolding of her life. Augusta, that is to say, embodies the persistence of the unrealized, or demonstrates how the state of being unrealized can itself

persist. And as a spinster—a figure who, in D.A. Miller's words, is thought to dwell in "a failed, or refused, but in any case shameful relation to the conjugal imperative" in part because of her "hopelessly insufficient social *realization*"[52]—she tends to Godfrey with nothing other than an unconjugated love.

But what kind of "future" can such a figure possibly deliver Godfrey into? However often critics have praised Augusta's "heroic" turn at the end of the book, few find Godfrey's return to life worthy of celebration. Grumbach, for instance, argues that when he "awakens to find he has been 'saved' by the seamstress Augusta, he is resurrected, not into life but into resignation. His new state is death-in-life. . . . He consoles himself with the realization that, if he is apathetic for the rest of his life, his family will never notice" (343). Marilee Lindemann echoes this notion by deeming this final scene—and the narrative it culminates—a "bleak parable of renunciation."[53] James D. Hart, likewise, argues that "this crisis, and his appreciation of the quiet patience of the old seamstress, reconcile him to continued existence, which he faces with a certain apathy but 'at least . . . the ground under his feet.'"[54]

And yet amidst the affective consensus of these descriptions (which cast Godfrey as bleak, resigned, reconciled), we might note that there also exists in this final scene the same kind of affirmative sufficiency that I elsewhere have identified as being the province of the spinster:[55] "He even felt a sense of obligation toward her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real. And when you admitted that a thing was real, *that was enough—now*" (256–257, emphasis mine). In the context of a book that has involved seeking escape from the over-full interiors of the white bourgeois household, that embodies formally the "unfurnishing" at the heart of Cather's novelistic principles as proclaimed in "The Novel Démeublé," to achieve an affirmative enoughness—this narrow space between longing and suffocation (or asphyxiation)—is no small task.[56] That this enoughness comes through an apparent retreat into the self is part of what leads critics to deem Godfrey's final turn a renunciation; however, in my reading, what Godfrey has cultivated is a sustaining form of self-companionship—one propelled by his renewed intimacy with both Augusta and the unrealized self that she recalls. In place of his conjugal bond with Lillian and his paternal relationship to his daughters and his beneficiary relationship to Empire, he allows his real

and unreal selves to sit side by side, prodigious in their laterality; what returns in and to the present is not only an unrealized past but also an unrealized community and a community of the unrealized—in Lowe's words, the "connections that could have been" (17).

Relatedly, this sustaining sufficiency is enabled by his ability to inhabit a defamiliarized present, a capacious "now" whose contours alter the dimensionality of the past and future in turn. With Augusta (that "world full of Augustas"), we might recall, he has the experience of being "outward bound." Here, Augusta embodies the vector of possibility—outward—that had heretofore been associated with Tom Outland, and with the attic window, both of which propel Godfrey toward an extra-familial homosocial space. The image of being outward bound—heading away from home on a ship—not only counters the momentum of his family's imminent return on the *Berengaria* but also serves as a complement (or alternative) to his earlier fantasy of shipwreck, which would have served as his own means of "escaping all that." (Once again, Augusta offers a version of escape not automatically commensurate with early death.) Furthermore, St. Peter's encounter with the boyhood Godfrey leads him to "bring[] up out of himself long-forgotten, unimportant memories of his early childhood, of his mother, his father, his grandfather" (241): a model that renders the past a kind of depth to be plumbed. With the past not behind but below, the future less before than beside (or outside), and intergenerationality less extended across bodies than coiled within the complex confines, and forms of self-relation, of a single life, Godfrey inhabits a model of queer lasting predicated on how the (unrealized) past itself queerly lasts.[57] When we return to those critics' laments about Godfrey's state at the end of the novel, we might notice that their own lexicon indicates something of this queer dimensionality. For their repeated prefix—*re*surrected, *re*signation, *re*nunciation, *re*concile—demonstrates the extent to which his final turn involves a "future" that is pursued through a (re)turn to the past: "re-," indexing both an "undoing" or a moving "backward," and the possibility of operating "again" or "anew."[58]

What emerges at the novel's end, accidentally and seemingly unbidden, is a "future" disentangled from conjugation, from the family, from the white possessive, from reproduction, from *realization* itself. It is a future that allows the unrealized possibilities of the past to persist as a source of

energy, rather than as a source of regret or longing, that acknowledges that what failed to happen in the past constitutes the environment of the present, is itself the "the ground under [our] feet." It is a future open to a "he" that, far from existing in a proprietary relationship to his own life, is fundamentally transpersonal, stitching together the "he" that Godfrey is, the "he" that Godfrey was, and, most profoundly, the "he" that Godfrey perhaps never had the chance to be. Indeed, "[h]e doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said goodbye to" (258). If he has "relinquished" his adult self in favor of the boy who persists within, and his engagement in family life in favor of citizenship in a "world full of Augustas," then perhaps it is only apt that his family will never "realize" it. If we want to call this "death-in-life," so be it. But if there is death here, it is the death only of a model of life predicated on (self-)realization, with its tendency to cast all of our other selves, all of our other lives, and all of our other ways of living and loving and being in community, into a state of illegibility.

What the spinster death doula has birthed, in other words, is the possibility of the boyhood Godfrey being welcomed into the Professor's house, and of the adult Godfrey continuing to unlive and unrealize and unconjugate his "own" life in turn. If, as Herring argues, the unrealized (this time in the sense of uncodified) male-male love of *The Professor's House* encourages us all to "unravel" the sexual cultures that have come to make us up, then it seems only fitting that the spinster seamstress is ultimately the one to facilitate such a process. And it seems only fitting that a queer author inclined to embody and narrate her own same-sex intimacies more in the vein of nineteenth-century spinsterliness than of twentieth-century homosexuality would write a novel that not only narrates but also embodies such unraveling. For in a kind of twist on the reimagined *Bildung* that Halberstam suggests might emerge from the forms of unbecoming at the heart of the queer art of failure, over the course of the novel, Godfrey (un)grows—or grows backward, to return to Cather's own privileged posture—from man to boy, from conjugated to infinitive, from the bounded protagonist of a realist novel to a member in a collective of unmarried, extrafamilial beings (living, dead, and in the ontological crack between) reminiscent of a regionalist sketch.

* * *

If Augusta embodies the persistent presence of the unrealized within the diegesis of *The Professor's House*, then she fills much the same role extradiegetically. For the "spinster/seamstress/nurse" is, as Lindemann has argued, a character "who seems patterned after so many of Jewett's women" (111). That the character plucked from the pages of regionalist fiction is, to again cite Lindemann, "literally a lifesaver" (111), especially in a moment when regionalism itself is understood in need of saving, seems a way of recalibrating the genre's own relationship to vitality and futurity, and also, conversely, of using regionalism's askance relationship to those terms to inform Godfrey's own queer lasting in the wake of his near death. Here, we may return to Cather's insistence that Jewett's sketches embody "persistence, survival"; are "living things" and even "life itself"; have "the possibility of a long, long life"; and offer "a message to the future." On the one hand, this has become a famously failed prophecy, as the life and future of *Pointed Firs* have hardly proven as durable as those of the two texts to which Cather compared it, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. On the other hand, if we understand "life" and "future" not as they are defined in majoritarian models of literary history, canon formation, and commercial success, but rather as they resonate within the spinsterly literary culture to which both Cather and Jewett (quite differently) belong—as involving intransitive tendings, avuncular and diagonal transmission, queer forms of continuity and continuance, and the illegible persistence of the past's unrealized possibilities—then perhaps Cather's prophecy of what could be—or, from our current vantage, of what could have been—is not as inaccurate as we have come to believe.

Lindemann's reading maps the "bleak parable of renunciation" of *The Professor's House* onto the "defeat of Cather's proposal [in her preface to *Pointed Firs*] that the 'forms' of American classics should be many" (113). But we might ask, conversely, how a reading of the ending as something other than renunciation—as an embrace of the unrealized persistence of that other self, and as the birth of an affirmative practice of unrealizing—can in turn index another way of understanding Cather's and Jewett's relationship to literary history. For the spinster's queer turn as savior less makes her normatively vital, or normatively futural, than it marks both St. Peter's and Cather's avowal of another way to go on: not into the unbounded possibility of the future, but within and through the unrealized possibilities of the past; not into the future as it will be, but through an ongoing present shaped by

the infinitive persistence of what could have been. If literary history was to leave Jewett behind, shipwrecked on the shores of a model that privileged influence, resemblance, and descent, that doesn't mean that her way of writing didn't persist, or that "Jewett, a spinster, could have no heirs." It is that unrealized persistence, and those queer forms of intergenerationality—the question of how a futureless literary mode lasts—toward which we are now outward bound.

3

Queer Unliving

Species of Extinction in the Literature of HIV/AIDS

Extinct, adj.: . . .

II. As adjective. (In early use with distinctly participial sense; in modern use it usually denotes a state without reference to the action from which this results.)

2.a. Of a fire, flame, light: Extinguished, quenched, put out; no longer burning. . . .

3. Of things comparable to a fire or light (e.g. life, hope, passion, disease, etc.): Quenched; that has ceased to burn or shine.

4. Of a person: Cut off; dead; blotted out of existence. Also, passed away, vanished. *Obsolete*.

5. That has died out or come to an end.

a. Of a family, a class of persons, a race or species of animals or plants: Having no living representative; 'without progressive succession' (Johnson).

b. Of an institution, dignity, office, etc.: Obsolete. Of a title of nobility: Having no qualified claimant.

—*Oxford English Dictionary*

For reasons that will soon become clear, let us begin this chapter precisely where the last one left off: with Professor Godfrey St. Peter, the protagonist of Willa Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House*, prone on the couch, nearing death after the attic window blew shut and the flame of the gas

stove extinguished. Once the spinster seamstress Augusta has come and gone, saving his life in the process, he sits alone again, reflecting on his inaction in the face of his predicament: “He had no more thought of suicide than he had thought of embezzling. He had always regarded it as a grave social misdemeanor—except when it occurred in very evil times, as a form of protest. Yet when he was confronted by *accidental extinction*, he had felt no will to resist, but had let chance take its way, as it had done with him so often.”[1]

Striking here is the way in which the language used to describe the Professor’s predicament slides from suicide—typically understood as an intentional act through which an individual ends his life—to extinction—a term for a collective, species-level, or population-level end. And, indeed, his is not simply an extinction, but also an accidental one—a formulation that risks seeming tautological, insofar as extinction seems by definition (as a matter of scale, if nothing else) to be unintentional.[2] How do we make sense of what it means to understand an individual’s death as a matter of extinction, especially when Godfrey St. Peter is not, in fact, the last man on earth?

As we already have seen, extinction and life, what disappears and what remains, are always entangled in *The Professor’s House*. And, indeed, we may explain the surprising appearance of that term at the end of the novel through recourse to a science that interrogates the relationship between the extant and the extinct, the emergent and the residual. I refer here not to archaeology, but to etymology, that practice likely deeply familiar to a Latinist professor who routes his unrealized life through the grammars of a dead language, which would have us recall that “extinction” comes from the Latin *extinguo*: to quench, extinguish, kill, destroy. Professor Godfrey St. Peter’s near death may be a near extinction, then, in the most literal sense of the term. Out goes the flame in the stove, nearly taking his life with it. Oddly, in the wake of a story that laments the slow erosion of all that has long “kindled” the Professor, it is this unintentional extinguishing, this close encounter with extinction, that enables him to “face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future” (258). If there seems to be a queer redundancy, or double negative, at stake in this final turn—that the near extinguishing of an already extinguished life allows the future to emerge—then that, too, is part of the point.

As this book rounds the bend from the (long) 1890s to the (long) 1980s, and shifts its focus from literary regionalism to AIDS literature, I linger with Godfrey St. Peter in part to gesture toward how the texts and topics from the first half of the project will persist in the form of unexpected textual echoes and reverberations, thus limning the queer kinship between two literatures composed nearly a century apart. But so too do I begin here because the final pages of *The Professor's House* index not only the central preoccupation of this chapter—extinction as it figures in queer literatures, and queer lives—but also many of its secondary concerns or complexities. How can extinction possibly become a path to "life" or futurity, when it seems definitionally to foreclose the arrival of both? What do accidental, residual, and habitual practices possibly have to do with how we confront the threat of extinction, a horizon that seems to demand deliberate, intentional action? What is the status of an individual death within the context of mass extinction? How do we care amidst losses that feel compounding, relentless, and—at worst—somehow inevitable? How does language—and, specifically, the linguistic work of etymologizing—figure into these paradigms? And how might "queer extinction"—an awkwardly redundant term that indexes the incompatibility of queerness and normative "life"—help us to approach the ethical, relational, and affective quandaries that environmental extinction events pose?

In recent years, extinction has become an increasingly operative term in humanists' discussions of the present and theorizations of our imperiled future. Whereas in his 2014 book *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*, Thom van Dooren could still claim that "[s]adly, extinction is not a topic that generates a great deal of popular interest at the present moment," while also prophesizing that "in the future to come—if humanity is here at all—extinction will be among the handful of themes that is understood to be central, perhaps even definitional, of our time,"[3] by 2018, Richard Grusin could make *After Extinction* the final installment in a trilogy of books that engage the question "What is twenty-first-century studies?"[4] Extinction—a word that we associate, at a species level, with the end of life, and, at a planetary level, with the end of the future itself—has become a keyword in and for our contemporary moment, functioning (like so many terms in the environmental humanities) across multiple, variously terrifying scales. On the one hand, we are living through a period of unprecedented species extinction radically outpacing the normal "background" rate.[5] On

the other, we are also dwelling within a sixth mass extinction; "unlike [the] others," Grusin reminds us, "the sixth extinction is attributed to the agency of humans, or more accurately to the agency of nonhuman processes set in motion by humans" (viii). Unlike (our narrative of[6]) earlier extinctions, which tend to foreground the role of catastrophic events, this extinction event is protracted, is happening to and caused by "us,"[7] and can be analyzed—if not directly experienced—as it unfolds. The scale and rate and totality of loss feel in many ways unprecedented, as does the fact that we face the prospect of living—and dying—through it.

In the face of such realities, we inevitably find ourselves seeking models for how to live amidst a time of extinction(s). On the first page of his bracing *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, David Wallace-Wells laments that there is not "any analogue to the scale or scope of this threat, in the long span of human history, that might give us confidence in staring it down" (1); however, writers belonging to groups forcibly excluded from both "life" and the "future" frequently critique such claims to absolute novelty.[8] Indeed, when we begin to catalog the questions raised of late by ecocritics concerned with the horizon of widespread, irrecoverable planetary loss, we might notice that they sound uncannily like the conversations happening within the queer community in the 1980s and early 1990s. If, as Matthew Chrulew recently has posited, our current ecological circumstances require us to consider "how we should love in a time of extinction,"[9] and, if Roy Scranton, who—as we saw in Chapter 1—has insisted that our task in the face of global climate change is to collectively "learn[] how to die,"[10] more recently has asked, "We're doomed. Now what?,"[11] I look to the literature of HIV/AIDS for possible answers.

In what follows, I offer a rereading of AIDS literature as an archive of species extinction written from within. I begin by considering how the threatened extinguishing of a group that has never been normatively alive complicates ecocritical and environmentalist understandings of extinction, which tend (seemingly necessarily) to presume the preexistence of "life." After demonstrating how extinction unexpectedly serves as a condition for, rather than simply the unraveling of, queer life, emergence, and generativity, I focus on the intensification of such logics amidst the HIV/AIDS crisis in the United States, an extinction event that threatened to

terminate not only an entire generation of gay men but also the ways of life—the erotic practices—through (and as) which queer culture was socially reproduced. Whereas the apparent redundancy of "queer extinction" justified the forms of institutional neglect that propelled the violence of the crisis, it also, I suggest, facilitated the creative remaking of life and care and language that the queer community developed in response.

The second half of the chapter turns specifically to one such practice of creative remaking, and attends to the surprising role that philology plays in AIDS literature. Looking to the work of Melvin Dixon and Allen Barnett, I demonstrate how etymology becomes a way for writers to navigate the temporal, ontological, and ethical questions of queer extinction. By offering models of persistence and kinship not predicated on the reproduction of life, etymology reorients queer survival away from vital(ist) futurity and toward the question of how extinct forms themselves persist and change. In contrast to recent accounts of extinction in the environmental humanities, which celebrate writing as a vitalizing force that can conjure new futures for endangered species, these literatures of queer extinction instead turn to residual practices, dead languages, and obsolete words, ultimately inhabiting and mobilizing the many possibilities of queer *unliving*. In making such an argument, I also begin to demonstrate how regionalism, this nominally extinct literary mode, itself queerly lasts.

Queer Extinctions

I am far from the first to engage extinction queerly; as the subject has risen to the fore in conversations across the humanities, it also has emerged as one of the many preoccupations that yokes queer theory and ecocriticism at the same time that it holds them apart. In his article in the "Queer Inhumanisms" special issue of *GLQ*, Neel Ahuja reflects that "perhaps queer theory has always been a theory of extinctions."[12] Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, in the introduction to the same issue, insist that queer theory emerges from an understanding that "queer survival [is] far from a given," and argue that "the primary catalyst for queer thought in general . . . [is hence] a desire to persist in the face of precarity."[13] In *The Modernist Art of Queer Survival*, Benjamin Bateman writes, "cast as survival's foe, queerness encounters an almost impossible dilemma: remain queer and risk

extermination, or conform as best as possible and extinguish itself."[14] It seems that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between queerness and extinction, something made legible not only in the content of these thinkers' claims but in the presence of totalizing terms from which queer theory often shies away: "always," "primary," "in general." In much ecological discourse, extinction (whether understood as an event or a process) marks the undoing of life; by contrast, queerness—as both a condition of being and a condition of thought—insists upon the ways in which becoming and extinction are themselves not opposed. Queerness, then, may in fact be an extant extinctness, or mark the extance of the extinct.

Such a claim, which may as yet seem enigmatic or impressionistic, emerges from the extent to which extinction, far from being a simple threat to queer life, is entangled with its emergence and persistence. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to articulate in full the historical and political links between homosexuality and extinction; for now, simply let me gesture toward the ideological logic that wholly identifies life (and species survival) with biological reproduction, and biological reproduction with heterosexuality. Explains Valerie Rohy, "Heterosexuality, in [the words of conservative commentators], enables the 'survival' and 'propagation' of the 'species,' even as homosexuality means 'extinction,' a 'dead end.'"[15] Although the identification of queerness with extinction clearly warrants critique when wielded toward homophobic ends, such a link in fact affirmatively characterizes this novel "species" defined at least in part by its nonreproductivity. For if the "strange existential twilight" of "functional extinction" begins once the remaining members of a species can no longer reproduce, then the homosexual-as-species queerly emerges as and persists in precisely such a state.[16] To the list of slang terms we have for queers, we might consider adding *endling*—that word that transmogrified from meaning the last in a family line to referring to the final surviving member of a species.[17] Endling: the last of its kin(d). Or, to put this another way: Queers, a kin(d) defined by being the last.[18]

Queer thinkers from disparate theoretical traditions have engaged this link between homosexuality and extinction, mobilizing both its corrosive and its potentially liberatory force. Guy Hocquenghem, for instance, argues that "[h]omosexual desire is the ungenerating-ungenerated terror of the

family, because it produces itself without reproducing. Every homosexual must see himself as the end of the species, the termination of a process for which he is not responsible and must stop at himself. . . . The homosexual can only be a degenerate, for he does not generate—he is only the artistic end to the species."[19] Both anticipating and inaugurating the antisocial thesis as it would come to flourish within North American queer theory, Hocquenghem hybridizes Leo Bersani's "questioning" of "the compatibility of homosexuality with civic service"[20] and Edelman's insistence that, via the force of queer negativity, the "future stop[s] here,"[21] identifying homosexuality with the "termination of [the] process" of species survival, "for which he is not responsible and must stop at himself." Interestingly, while the homosexual in such an account "does not generate," neither does he fully cancel or undo that latter term. Rather, he (and Hocquenghem) modifies it with prefixes; the homosexual *degenerates* and *ungenerates*, re- and unmaking generativity from within. Such queer (un)generation, rather than being defined in contradistinction to termination and ending, is predicated upon it. Writing from a quite different vantage point, Bateman makes a complementary argument, considering how "this novel species, unfit for the procreative imperatives of normative personhood, might survive and imagine its survival differently" (4).[22] The resulting model, in which "the self expands by losing and lives by dying" (4), and in which "weakness, frangibility, uncertainty, dispossession, senescence, indistinction, and even morbidity play a vital role" (5), gestures toward, even as it does not name, the intimate intertwinement of queer survival and queer extinction.

Ultimately, a paradox emerges: in queer life, extinction (and the experience of navigating it) becomes a source of continuity, rather than solely of rupture, and a precondition of collective life rather than solely a threat to it.[23] Such complexities came to resonate with new power in the face of HIV/AIDS, which both intensified and newly weaponized the longstanding association of queerness and extinction. For the concretizing of this link during the epidemic risked making mass death seem so inevitable as to be a non-event; gayness, it seemed, had simply reached its final cul-de-sac, dwelling in and as that (homophobically hoped for) dead end. As Jeff Nunokawa writes in a 1991 essay: "If, as Simon Watney remarks, 'the spectacle of AIDS calmly and constantly entertains the

possible prospect of the death of all . . . gay men . . . without the slightest flicker of concern, regret, or grief,' this is partly because the culture that watches this spectacle, even with, perhaps especially with, concern, regret, and grief, sees a population doomed to extinction, anyway."[24] But, as we shall see, the definition of homosexuality as exterior to normative life, futurity, and species reproduction grounded not only the violently homophobic responses to mass queer death but also the creative forms of care, kinship, and artistic production that the queer community developed in response. In other words: queer writers composing within the epidemic refused the homophobic alignment of homosexuality and extinction and the forms of social and institutional abandonment that it justified not—or not only—by insisting on the *vitality* of queers and queerness, but rather—or also—by differently inhabiting queerness's askance relationship to the reproduction of life, and by embracing the concomitant possibility that extinction itself can be the ground of kinship and persistence.

* * *

AIDS literature is not customarily considered a literature of extinction, likely in part because that genre (such that it can even be said to exist) is associated with the endangerment and extinguishing of non-human species, and in part because such a categorization risks implicitly endorsing the alignment of homosexuality and extinction that structured homophobic violence, abandonment, and neglect in the United States. And yet a rereading of this body of work in such terms reveals it to be an incredibly moving, precise, and capacious archive of the relay between individual and collective death at stake at extinction, one that viscerally and subtly inhabits the structures and affects of species-level loss. Authors writing from within the epidemic hauntingly figure its scalar dimensions, tracing the terrifying slide toward total loss (what Simon Watney called "the possible prospect of the death of all . . . gay men";[25] the fear indexed in Paul Monette's comment "We're all going to get it"[26]). In "Philostorgy, Now Obscure," it is an "address book filled with names of the dead . . . one for practically every letter of the alphabet."[27] In Monette's *Borrowed Time*, it is a blank calendar, indexing both the absence of companions and the inability to plan a future (192). In Rebecca Brown's "The Gift of Death," it is the recitation of "so do"s and "so did"s as an elevator climbs slowly in its shaft: "By the time

Roy finished ‘so did,’ we’d gone up two floors.”[28] In Paula Treichler’s critical oeuvre, it is the image of an AIDS quilt too large to be displayed whole cloth.[29] It is death, A to Z; death, January to December; death, basement to penthouse; death, a blanket unable to bring any succor or warmth.

It is, in other words, loss with a duration and a geography, loss turned total environment. It is loss that you can’t outrun, loss that waits on the stoop and by the bedside. Says Severo Sarduy: “I understood what my body was telling me: AIDS is a stalking. It feels as if someone, at any moment, under any pretext at all, could knock on the door and carry you off forever; as if an unrecognizable danger hovered in the air and could solidify, jell, in the space of an instant. Who will be next? How long will you escape? Everything gets heavy, like a threat.”[30] Here, AIDS not only is the conduit between the fleeting (“any moment,” “an instant”) and the permanent (“forever”)[31] but also, as it lurks, “hover[ing] in the air” and threatening to “solidify, jell,” atmospherically *conditions* the experience of everyday life. AIDS is the ticking of the clock, the temporal through line, the climate in which we live. In queer culture, then, extinction is not the extinguishing of time, as Deborah Bird Rose has argued in an ecological context, but itself constitutes a temporality and an environment.[32]

Importantly, then, extinction is not simply a scaling up of terminality, but also a remaking of its logics. Within the context of AIDS and what Dagmawi Woubshet has deemed its “compounding loss,” prospects for communal queer existence are shaped by each individual death; extinction, differently from terminality, thus implicates the community, all of whom are aware that this very well could be—and, perhaps, *will be*—them.[33] In Dixon’s poem “One By One,” which counts down in T-cells as it counts up in fatalities, we learn of “The mounting thousands./It begins with one and grows by one/and one and one and one/until there’s no one left to count.”[34] The ambiguity of the last phrase, “no one left to count”—which means either that there is no one left to be counted or that there is no one left to do the counting, perhaps because, when we are dealing with the last man on earth, this person is one and the same—indexes the perverse relay at stake in AIDS literature, where the witness and the witnessed are in a proximate, intimate, contagious, or otherwise non-differentiated relationship to one another.[35]

In other words: within the context of AIDS, the prospects for communal queer existence are shaped by each individual loss. Unlike terminality, the horizon of extinction affects the very definition and experience of life itself. (Terminality is the end of life; extinction is a transformation of it.) Upon reading a *New York Times* article about the epidemic, one of Barnett's characters reflects: "It really doesn't sit well to read about one's mortality in such general terms" (100). Another worries of a fellow vacationer: ". . . for if it was *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, then Enzo did have AIDS. One more person in the house would have it, one more to make it impossible to escape for a weekend, one more to remind us how short our lives were becoming" (108). This slide from the individual to the collective, from "Enzo" to "us," is indicative not only of the epidemiological contagion of the disease but also of the experiential and epistemological contagion of the climate of HIV. Indeed, this generalized mortality (and illness) affects the entire community to the extent that to be HIV-negative is no longer to be straightforwardly "well," as Walt Odets theorizes in *In the Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV-Negative in the Age of AIDS*: "All gay men live with HIV and AIDS, whether the virus now exists in their own bodies or in the bodies of those they love, live and work with, identify with, and sometimes fear. Being gay means being profoundly affected by the epidemic. . . ."[36] The experience of "living with HIV and AIDS" is as totalizing as is the threat of death.

Unsurprisingly, such a totalizing condition is accompanied by particular affective dimensions, or structures of feeling. As the haunting countdown of "One By One" begins to indicate, the prospect of total loss also brings with it the possibility of being the last man standing—and the affective and relational complexities that result. If a terminal diagnosis precipitates the fear of one's own death, a climate of extinction also (or instead) precipitates the fear of losing everyone else.[37] In other words, what is the fear endemic to extinction if not the fear that you will indeed be the last—Martha the passenger pigeon alone in the cage in Cincinnati, no one to touch, nowhere to fly? Says William Dickey, "I . . . feel to a degree unpeopled."[38] Reflects Monette, upon seeing a friend's obituary in the *New York Times*, "there is no one I can call for details because all of our mutual acquaintance is dead" (306). Rebecca Makkai opens *The Great Believers*, her 2018 novel on the *longue durée* of the AIDS epidemic, with a scene in which, after her protagonist comes downstairs at a memorial gathering only to find the

house empty, “The foggy, ridiculous idea came to him that the world had ended, that some apocalypse had swept through and *forgotten only him*.”[39] If E.O. Wilson, seeking an alternative to the term “Anthropocene,” has claimed that we are approaching the Eremozoic Era, “the Age of Loneliness,” then perhaps once again queer experience proves *extant* what environmental criticism deems prospective and possible.

As the excerpt from *The Great Believers* indexes, scholars and contemporary writers who seek language for the terrifying, totalizing sweep of AIDS often turn to rhetorics of apocalypse, which simultaneously mark what Sarah Schulman deems the “end of the world” feeling of the epidemic and invoke a literary tradition of writing at and through the revelations of that end.[40] Susan Sontag famously claims, in *AIDS and its Metaphors*, that “Apocalypse is now a long-running serial: not ‘Apocalypse Now’ but ‘Apocalypse From Now On’”;[41] Peter Coviello, likewise, has offered a trenchant account of the American government’s wielding of the quotidianized (and localizable) apocalypse of HIV/AIDS as an instrument of biopolitical control.[42] Less often discussed, however, is the frequency with which writers composing from within the experience of HIV/AIDS themselves turned to the language of extinction, which was capable of indexing both the totalizing and the particularizing dimensions of the epidemic. Where apocalypse brings about the end of the world (as we know it), extinction brings the end of the (always tentative, always provisional, always hard-won) ways populations have learned to survive within it. Through extinction, we lose lives and ways of life; we lose each other and ourselves. Extinction thus also once again indexes the intimacy of the relationship between the self and the other, or the individual and the collective; whereas apocalypse—like the generalized term “epidemic”—is often understood to suggest a kind of undifferentiated and perhaps arbitrary threat,[43] the specific experience of living (and dying) as a gay man amidst the AIDS crisis was that of belonging to a “species” endangered precisely because of its sexuality. If apocalypse conventionally threatens the existence of the world (or the “general population”) as a whole, extinction threatens the existence of a particular group within it, while also serving as the condition of that group’s social (hyper)legibility.[44]

Although retrospective accounts of AIDS rarely if ever describe it in terms of species extinction, those writing within the shadow of the epidemic

frequently invoked such language, using the increasingly familiar[45] images of environmental crisis not only to index the scale of the loss and the depths of institutional neglect, but also to begin to suggest possibilities for action and response. In Sontag's 1986 short story "The Way We Live Now," a character responds to the alteration of erotic life by lamenting that "sexuality is a chain that links each of us to many others, unknown others, and now the great chain of being has become a chain of death as well."[46] Terrifyingly, queer sex "now" was not only nonreproductive but also threatened to unravel extant life; we might recall the lines quoted in the introduction from Essex Hemphill's remarkable poem "Now We Think": "Now we think/as we fuck/this nut might kill./This kiss could turn/to stone." Here, in sex becoming deadly and the erotic becoming fossil, we witness sexuality enmeshed with the horizon of extinction.

Hemphill is also one writer who explicitly identified as an "endangered species"; expressing his fury at the way in which his chances for survival were compromised by being Black, gay, and HIV-positive, he wrote in "Cordon Negro":

> I'm sick of being an endangered species,
> sick of being a goddamned statistic.
> So what are my choices?
> . . .
> I'm dying twice as fast
> as any other American.[47]

The slippage across the poem between the singular lyric "I" and population-level categories—here, "statistic," on the one hand, and "any other American," on the other—indexes the way in which extinction enmeshes individual and collective destinies, engendering the perverse relay that Dixon formalized in "One By One."

The arithmetic of racialized endangerment evident in Hemphill's "I'm dying *twice as fast*/as any other American" recurs in Dixon's OutWrite '92 speech "I'll Be Somewhere Listening for My Name." Concretizing his lament over "how vulnerable we are as gay men, as black gay men, to the disposal or erasure of our lives," he tells the story of his friend and former

student Gregory, whose memorial service programs were "shredded, burned, and the refuse carted away" before his lover could return for them. "Greg," he goes on to say, "had been cremated once again, but this time without remains or a classy urn to house them"—a predicament that he then casts as the generalized lot of Black gay men, who are subject to a "*double cremation.*"[48] Darius Bost reads this latter phrase as "signal[ing] how the obliterating forces of antiblackness and antiqueerness doubly mark the black gay body for social and corporeal death";[49] in the present context, we might extend that insight by noting how the etymological connection between "extinguishing" and "extinction" enables the smoldering image of "cremation" to index not solely individual but also collective (and even species-level) death.[50]

Hemphill and Dixon are hardly idiosyncratic in their engagement with such logics. Attention to the Black gay community's *specific* vulnerability to extinction in fact resounds across Black gay men's cultural production of the 1980s and 1990s, traversing literary and cinematographic genres. For instance, early in *Tongues Untied*, Marlon T. Riggs's 1989 experimental documentary foregrounding the particularity of Black gay experience (and featuring Hemphill), a series of words flash across the screen, their white typescript bold against a black background: "Howard Beach/Virginia Beach/Yusef Murder/CRACK/AIDS/BLACK MEN/Endangered Species?"[51] Linking 1986 and 1989 scenes of anti-Black violence (at Howard Beach and Virginia Beach, respectively) to the 1989 murder of Brooklyn teenager Yusef Hawkins by a white mob to the prevalence of crack (and the "war on drugs") to the AIDS epidemic, Riggs effectively constellates intersecting forces that render Black men an "endangered species." Likewise, in Riggs's 1994 film *Black Is . . . Black Ain't*, released after his death from AIDS-related complications and featuring scenes where he speaks from his hospital bed as his physical strength palpably wanes, he reflects: "AIDS is central to the catalyst that's pushing me to deal with identity on the global perspective. The connection between AIDS and Black folks and Black folks' identity isn't metaphoric. Both of them struggle against the odds. And they face adversity in the face of possible extinction. How do we keep ourselves together as a people in the face of all our differences? How do we maintain a sense of communal selfhood, if you will?"[52] Strikingly, whereas in *Tongues Untied*, reflecting on the collective

experience of Black men leads Riggs to the question of "endangered species?," in *Black Is . . . Black Ain't*, it is the horizon of extinction—in this case, specifically in the context of AIDS—that inspires Riggs to think about "Black folks"—"together," "communally," "global[ly]"—as a population. Such gestures are hardly inert, either socially or politically. Given that only the extant can go extinct, expressing a fear of extinction becomes a way not only of indexing specific contours of vulnerability but also of insisting upon the vitality and viability of a group whose existence is often defined in relation to social death. If the mainstream media, in the face of the disease's epidemic contours, worried after the fate of the "general population" from which gay men (among others) were excluded, and if Black gay men were "doubl[y]" vulnerable, "dying twice/as fast as any other American," then the invocation of extinction is one way that those excluded others asserted their status as, precisely, *a people*. The horizon of extinction thus may be "evidence of being," to adapt Bost's resonant titular phrase.

Such a relay between extinction and population logics emerges, too, in the work of Paul Monette, a white novelist, memoirist, and poet whom Woubshet reads—along with Dixon—within the cultural context of Black spirituals and their associated modes of mourning.[53] In his collection *Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog*, composed in the immediate aftermath of the AIDS-related death of his partner, Roger Horwitz, Monette writes through his most intimate grief both on its own terms and as it compounds within the totalizing scale of the epidemic. In "Half Life," which tries to make sense of the fact that, following Horwitz's death, "exactly half the phenomenal world is gone," Monette toggles vertiginously between the daily habits of coupled life and the transtemporal sweep of species extinction, indicating how this most personal of losses is inflected by all the epidemic has taught him about (as he says in the volume's preface) "*what it means to be a people*"[54]:

> I want the rest of me to be the rest of you
> but cut in half like this how can I I read
> your '80s diary its limpid accounts the blessed
> dailiness gold as winter sunset and you say
> *Paul had a bad meeting* or *Paul's upset*

about NOTHING I SWEAR IT WAS NOTHING AT ALL
I was totally intact but didn’t know and
now the sun’s cold and the moon and rivers
die mid-cataract the species from N to Z are extinct not a tiger left
leafing . . .

There remains a significant difference between Monette’s invocation of species extinction, which figurally indexes the sheer magnitude (and, potentially, the cultural import) of a loss that is hardly his “alone,” and Hemphill’s, which understands endangerment as an index of the social disposability (Dixon’s “refuse”) that alienates him both from the “general population” of the United States and from a queer culture whose public image was prevailingly white. In other words, the extinction for which Hemphill’s death would be metonym is considered less grievable than both that of white gay men and that of the animals both poets’ figuration invokes. In the opening lines of “For My Own Protection,” Hemphill announced:

I want to start
an organization
to save my life.
If whales, snails,
dogs, cats,
Chrysler, and Nixon
can be saved,
the lives of Black men
are priceless
and can be saved.
We should be able
to save each other.
I don’t want to wait
for the Heritage Foundation
to release a study

stating Black men
are almost extinct.

Just as Hemphill tinkered with the rhetoric of AIDS in “Cordon Negro” in saying that he was “sick of being an endangered species,” “sick of being a goddamned statistic,” identifying illness not simply with the virus but also with the experience of living (and dying) as a disposable population, here what the poet-speaker wishes he could do “for [his] own protection” is not to engage in safe sex or other gestures of individual prophylaxis, but instead to build structures through which “Black men” can “save each other.” Rather than farcically waiting for the Heritage Foundation to (triumphantly?) announce Black men’s status as endlings, and rather than wait for white liberals to deem Black gay endangerment as concerning as that of the nonhuman species they support with their contributions to the World Wildlife Foundation, the speaker wonders after the capacity of the “we” to effect their own collective salvation. Here, the pronoun itself becomes the intermediary between the lonely isolation of individual deaths (and personal mourning)—the haunting calculus of “no one left to count,” the grief-stricken stutter of Monette’s “how can I I”—and the simultaneously overwhelming and dehumanizing experience of species-being, of belonging to a population culturally legible only as a mortality statistic.

Love’s Instrument: Etymology, Kinship, and Queer Unliving

Beyond their emotional power, these poems startle in their very premise: that a lyric “I” is writing about (or through) his own extinction. This shift in perspective in turn challenges many ecocritical presumptions about how extinction functions literarily. In part because we still associate extinction with non-human species, we presume that a literary response to it is written from the outside; although van Dooren resists a logic of human exceptionalism in his own humanistic study of species extinction, he simultaneously insists that “[w]e are the generations that are *overseeing* the loss of so much of the diversity of living forms on this planet,” a formulation which not only casts his readers, like himself, in a managerial

position but also suggests their ability to adopt a birds-eye view.[55] If such an approach implicitly places the authors and readers of extinction narratives on the same aerial plane as the endangered birds whom they are encountering, then this proximity also facilitates a kind of salutary contagion, whereby human writing, positioned securely within the world of the living, aims to revitalize those species dwelling at the edge of extinction. In the face of the "*unraveling* of ways of life" that he associates with extinction phenomena, van Dooren offers his narratives as remediating forms of "weaving"; further, he "takes a particularly 'lively' approach to telling stories about life and death in the shadow of extinction," offering tales that "*add flesh to the bones of the dead and dying*, that give them some vitality, presence, perhaps 'thickness'" (8, emphasis mine)—a description that makes narrative sound a lot like AZT.

Ursula Heise, for her part, insists on moving beyond the elegiac and tragic modes that we associate with extinction, in part because "stories and images of decline go only so far."[56] *Imagining Extinction* asks whether it is "possible to acknowledge the realities of large-scale species extinction and yet to move beyond mourning, melancholia, and nostalgia to a more affirmative vision of our biological future?" (13) This investment in newness and futurity—and a new futurity—is stitched throughout Heise's account; she calls for a "new kind of environmentalism" (12)—or, a page earlier, "a new, future-oriented environmentalism" (11)—that emerges from new genres (14–15) and "affirmative visions of the future" (12). Both critics toe the line between reckoning with mass death and trying to hold it at bay; writing becomes a kind of prophylactic against loss, a way of securing on the page a liveliness—a fleshiness—that they hope will bleed into an endangered world.

But what happens—as was the case during the AIDS epidemic, and is potentially the case now, amidst the unfolding catastrophe of global climate change—when the extinction we are encountering is our own? What happens to narrative (Heise's key term) when extinction is no longer an externalized phenomenon, and when writers and readers themselves (ourselves) are no longer securely positioned within the realm of the living, with "futurity" and "new"ness within their sights? If, following Woubshet, the compounding losses of AIDS confound the temporality of Freudian mourning, which "assumes a priori the survival or future time of any given

mourner" (18), then so too do they confound the presumed futurity of any given writer or reader—especially at a moment, as Rick H. Lee has shown, when literature often served a pedagogical function, written by the seropositive for the seropositive, who were learning anew how to live while simultaneously (to again invoke both Sontag and Scranton) "learning how to die."[57] And if writers' futurity was hardly secure, then neither, even more startlingly, was their extant vitality. Reflected William Dickey in his essay "Last Time," "I do feel now, when I write poetry, as if I were writing from some place outside of life" (8). Written by the dying for the dying, composed within the "eroding present"[58] of terminal illness by writers positioned—for multiple reasons—outside the bounds of normative life, the resulting pieces capaciously trace (to modify the title of Marie Howe's AIDS elegy) *what the unliving do*.[59]

Amidst mass losses that confounded language and representation,[60] writers composing within the shadow of the epidemic turned with surprising frequency to a non-mimetic way of navigating the questions of living, dying, and lasting so fundamentally at stake in the crisis: the practice of etymology. This seemingly anachronistic interest in the persistence of dead languages, and in the question of linguistic origins and transmission, may be surprising to encounter, both within the authors' immediate political context and in the context of our contemporary moment's customary response to crisis and emergency. If, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, SILENCE=DEATH, and action thus equaled speaking up and out, "live" and in public, these authors embraced a linguistic practice more frequently involving hushed libraries than activist rallies, and more clearly associated with dead languages than an investment in "more life."[61] And in contradistinction to the frequency with which contemporary critics and activists—including Heise—insist upon the need for new genres and to "move beyond" old modes, these writers invested in residual practices such as etymology, which is itself concerned with how the nominally extinguished past itself persists.

In a recent article comparing rhetorics of extinction to rhetorics of apocalypse, Marc Redfield argues that "extinction means disappearance without residue," a puzzling claim that emerges at least in part from the redundancy of the term's etymology: "[t]he word is interestingly tautological: *extinguo* is a third conjugation verb based on *stinguo*, which

itself means to extinguish or put out, which in turn means that the *ex*-prefix adds almost nothing, just a little extra death: *extinguo*—to quench, extinguish, kill, destroy. The *ex* . . . is an x of excessive withdrawal, the mark of an extra extinguishing."[62] For Redfield, an etymological complexity renders extinction a name for full disappearance; however, for AIDS-era writers, whose work and existence are entangled with extinguishing, the complexities of etymology help to index how extinction itself can be a way of remaining. In the works that I consider, etymology becomes a way for authors to navigate the ontological complexities of queer extinction, modeling how unliving entities (in this case, obsolete languages) die and persist, while also offering non-vitalist models of kinship adequate to the ethical demands of the epidemic.[63]

Dixon's "Etymology: A Father's Gift," for instance, published posthumously in the 1995 collection *Love's Instruments*, uses etymology as the locus for an engagement with intergenerational resemblance and transmission. Throughout, the poem is preoccupied with kinship, legacy, inheritance, and language—and the relationship among these terms. Etymology, we learn, is the titular father's "gift," which seems to mean both "talent" and "object given." Indeed, the poem traffics in the questions of how we give and receive, variously freely; the word that the father looks up in the dictionary while seeking "clues/to what [his family] say[s] [they] want" is "beg." There is, throughout the poem, a persistent question of kinship—both the linguistic kinship between words that "share an origin or source" and the blood kinship between people who share the same genetic "root."

In keeping with such a preoccupation, the characters in the poem emerge through a purely relational logic (via the pronoun play in "*he* [the father] searches the dictionary for clues/to what *we* say *we* want"; via labels such as "my mother," "the elder girl," "the first son"; via the repetition of "with"), and the poem insistently depicts failures of connection. The "youngest daughter" approaches with a kiss but "return[s] empty"; the mother's "nervous fingers" "caress[]" only "space." Among the many causes of non-reciprocity seems to be this: the father's economy is linguistic, the other family members' gestural. Strangely, the only time we see etymology indexed other than in the title is in the final word of the poem, "root"—"The third boy and I, at any stranger's crotch,/with a

stuttering stuttering for the root." On the one hand, it seems like the speaker's queerness—his non-reproductive eroticism, his possible seropositivity[64]—threatens to bring an end to the forms of intergenerational transmission (material and otherwise) with which the poem is consistently concerned. On the other, not only the turn to the "root" but also the invocation and performance of the (linguistic) "stuttering" links the speaker to the father, intergenerationally, somehow reciprocating a gesture or making contact in the way that the other family members' empty gestures fail to do. Furthermore, "stuttering," which emerges from the Proto-Germanic **staut*, to "push, thrust," is etymologically related to the erotic gesture indexed, a fact which in turn might remind us that "root" has, since at least 1846, been a slang term for penis.

Etymology, then, may be both the father's gift and the poet-speaker's. Here, queer eroticism yields not normative life or a reproductive future but rather a kin relation predicated on desire, impersonality ("any stranger's crotch"), and the dead languages of the past. As opposed to a model of inheritance or intergenerational gifting, begging, or begetting that involves passing on the family name, transmission here seems fundamentally anonymous, impersonal, and illegible. (Indeed, the similarity between father and son here may be as hard to notice as is the persistence of the etymological root in the contemporary word.[65]) Strangely, it is the speaker's eroticism that somehow unites the linguistic and gestural economies of the poem; it seems, by the final line, that queer sex itself etymologizes.

If we read this poem in the context of the broader volume in which it was published, a question arises: what might it mean to understand (a queered, embodied, relational) etymology as one of *Love's Instruments*? And how might etymology, both on its own terms and as an instrument of (queer) love, help us make sense of the questions of transmission, persistence, survival, and collectivity that become so vital (pun intended) in the context of extinction?

Such questions emerge not only in Dixon's body of work, but also in Barnett's 1990 collection *The Body and its Dangers*, whose characters consistently etymologize as they learn how to collectively and individually inhabit the epidemic. Throughout the book, which was both Barnett's first and his last, and whose title indicates the fact that, amidst AIDS, bodies were simultaneously endangered and endangering, characters engage with

philology in the course of wrestling with the constitutive intertwinement of life and death, of origins and ends, of what fades and what lasts; etymology in particular becomes a way for them to make sense of the persistent presence of the unlived and unliving past. A character in "The Body and Its Seasons" "looks up the word 'innocence' in the dictionary, only to realize that "The word shared its past with *noxious*, which meant to hurt or injure" (24); in the collection's next story, "Philostorgy, Now Obscure"—the piece to which I will turn at greater length for the remainder of this chapter—the dying protagonist, Preston, returns to the place (and friends, and lover) with whom he shared his past, etymologizing his life in the shadow of its end. A character in "The Body and Its Dangers" can't "stop confusing the word *genesis* with *genocide* with *genetics*" (154); here, the blurring of life and death, individual and collective so resonant throughout Barnett's work (and in the context of the epidemic more generally) emerges via the play of false cognates, a word which itself also means "blood relative." And of course these two questions—the blurring of life into death and the ramifications of a shared past—convene in the context of HIV/AIDS. If, in Dixon's poem, queer sex etymologizes, then in Barnett's collection, gay men consistently etymologize their erotic lives. In "*The Times* as It Knows Us," friends gathered on Fire Island compulsively "read the death notices for anything that might connect [them] to someone from the past" since "many of the dead were people with whom we had sex" (70). In "Philostorgy," Preston finds his once-esoteric interest in Classical languages and linguistic roots vitally important in his attempt to navigate the complexities of the disease and its treatment options. His "fluency in a Greek-like and [L]atinate language of cancers, viruses, funguses, and rare pneumonias" (41) is echoed by another story's protagonist's (somewhat less successful) attempt to make sense of his own opportunistic infection via the instrument of etymology: "*Cyto* means cell; *megalo* is large" (69).

* * *

In *The Body and Its Dangers*, etymology—as we saw in Cather's work—again indexes "curious survivals": including the way in which dead languages persist in the speech of the living, and nominally extinct texts persist in the urgent literature of late twentieth-century crisis. In what follows, I read "Philostorgy, Now Obscure"—the story in the collection

most directly engaged with questions of philology—as a cognate of *The Professor's House*, and thereby also limn a model of literary affiliation predicated not on normative genealogies of inheritance and descent, but instead on the queer kinship at stake in etymology. By transforming etymology, a seemingly retrospective practice, into a generative mode that can catalyze queer *emergence*, Barnett writes queer extinction as queer lasting and also indirectly demonstrates how the nominally extinct genre of American literary regionalism curiously survives.

"Philostorgy, Now Obscure"—first published in the *New Yorker* on May 27, 1990, fifteen months before Barnett died of complications from AIDS[66]—reads like an unintentional rewriting of Cather's novel, this time set in—and focusing on—not the Professor's house but the students' apartment. "Philostorgy" tells the story of Preston, a thirty-something New Yorker, who returns to his hometown of Chicago in the wake of learning that that he has full-blown AIDS and cytomegalovirus. Although part of the motivation for his return is the need to tell his foster mother the news, he has come home primarily to reunite with his two college roommates, Roxy and Lorna, and to spend time together in their college apartment, which Roxy now owns. Much of the story takes place in the apartment, as Preston sifts through the women's differing reactions to his diagnosis and gently assesses what remains of their shared past. However, near the end of the story he ventures out to fleetingly rekindle his relationship with Jim, the college boyfriend with whom he briefly thought he would share his life. The story as a whole mixes living with unliving, toggling between that return to what was—to the years that he and the two women spent living together—and a return to what was not—to the years that he and Jim have spent apart, which he comes to deem his "unlived life," his newfound desire to examine its contours refuting his former college professor's (and Lorna's now-husband's) quip that "an unlived life is not worth examining" (50).

Much like Godfrey St. Peter, Preston accesses the possibilities of the unrealized via his investment in and knowledge of dead languages; his most notable habit is his tendency to etymologize, a verb which emerges as the main action of "Philostorgy" itself. Over the course of the story, Preston etymologizes his own (lived and unlived) life, tracing tendencies back to their origins and relationships back to their roots, carefully assessing the link between what fades and what remains, and learning how the unlived or unliving parts of him condition the experience of his still-living self.

The title of “Philostorgy, Now Obscure” looks like the heading of a dictionary entry. And so one way to read the story that follows is as a redefinition of this archaic term. According to the *OED*, Philostorgy means “Parental love; natural affection.” Interestingly, like extinction, this word, too, is tautological. For *storge* means “Natural affection; usually, that of parents for their offspring.”[67] To invoke Redfield, we might say that the *philo-* “adds almost nothing, just a little extra” love. But in a dictionary, of course, the heading is likelier to read “Philostorgy, Now Obs.”—where “Obs.” means not “Obscure” but “Obsolete.” And so we might also read the story as limning or inhabiting the difference between “obsolete”—“no longer used or practiced”—and “obscure”—an index of illegible persistence. Philostorgy: disappearing, with residue. Philostorgy: still there, if only we know how (or where, or when) to look.

These two possibilities, it turns out, can hardly be separated in Barnett’s work. For “Philostorgy, Now Obscure” (re)defines its titular term by attending to the way in which even the most seemingly remote or obsolete forms of love may in fact persist. (The story itself is also responsible for bringing “philostorgy”—a seemingly obsolete *word* for love—back to the lexicon after a 329-year absence. Philostorgy, now obscure.) In allowing a word on the cusp of its own obsolescence to ground its account of intimacy and emergence, the story also models the way in which extinction can be a path to queer extance, persistence, and generativity.

Although there is much to say about etymology in the story, it may be worth beginning with the fact that Preston most frequently ponders the etymology of words having to do with reproductive futurity and/or love (for instance, “amniocentesis,” the procedure that the thrice-pregnant Lorna need not endure this time around), seemingly rerouting his own understanding of futurity and care and even life itself through the residual presence of the past. Indeed, it is the enduring presence of a philodendron in Roxy’s dining room that leads to Preston’s first lengthy act of etymologizing:

> Preston said nothing, allowing them their moment of grief, as if it was his to give, a possession he could pass on, like a keepsake. His doctor had wept giving him the diagnosis, while Preston had looked in the mirror behind the doctor’s desk and the reflection seemed to tell him,

> “This is you now. You are a sick person. What will you think about? What will hold your interest?” He knew in the way one knew these things that his death would be a fast one, the particular infection, the harsh drug used to treat it. . . .
>
> Preston looked around the dining room as the women wept. This had been their favorite room when the three of them lived together as undergraduates. It had a south window and the sun came in all day long. There was nothing in it but a table, chairs, and a plant, a philodendron that was in the same place he had put it twelve years ago. In the decade that the three of them had lived apart, it had grown as high as the ceiling, claiming the corner with the unfolding of each new leaf. A philodendron’s name implied self-love, he thought, if one was a tree. *Philo*, love; *dendron*, tree—loving tree, or love of trees. Narcissism seemed to impel this one. Philharmonic, he thought, was love of music; philosophy, love of wisdom; philopolemic (rare), love of war or disputes. Philter was a love potion, philander actually meant fond of men. Philostorgy, meaning natural affection, was now obscure. (36–37)

Whereas the women and his doctor respond to his diagnosis with grief, Preston responds (both here and in the immediate aftermath of his diagnosis, a scene I will discuss shortly) with etymology, love’s (or *philo*’s) instrument. While the others’ emotion seems predicated on their anticipation of his death, his seems invested instead in a kind of queer retrospect, tracing the dead past’s persistence in order to discover its possible emergences. For he is interested not only in the way in which a dead language shapes the way we (speak of) love, but also in the simultaneous change and stasis that has inhered in his absence. If it is the “same”ness of the philodendron that first captures his attention, as an index of how what *once was still is*, then his tracing of the leaves—the inverse of his etymological tracing of roots—transforms his absence from the room (and the friends’ decade of distance from each other) into the very ground of the plant’s spread, as though their separateness is the condition of its growth.

The scene of diagnosis also catalyzes Preston’s literalization of etymology—an act of extinguishing that enables an indirect encounter with

extinction. In the story's sole flashback, the one time that the past is narrated directly rather than emerging through the rereading of letters or the recounting of old stories in conversation, Preston returns home from the doctor's office and begins to dispose of his possessions, including his college notebooks and journals. He "ripped [their pages] from their black bindings, then burned them in the sink like love letters after a divorce till there was nothing left but ash and smoke that hovered near the ceiling and made the fire alarm scream like a banshee. He needed to do the same with old friends, affect their memory of him, introduce himself anew and say 'This is me now'" (47). Here, as we witness "love unbound" (to invoke Coviello's account of Jewett's queerness[68]) and see the old "flame" of self-love rekindled, we begin to understand etymology not only as a model of kinship and inheritance, but also as a paradigm for queer (self-)relation and queer (self-)care.

This gesture of self-extinguishing, which by the end of the scene also suggests a queer gesture of self-genesis (recall, again, the moment elsewhere in the collection that depicts the confusion of *genesis* with *genetics* and *genocide*), less erases the past than it does tinker with how the nominally concluded past persists into the present. Indeed, given that Preston's examination of "the unlived life" follows shortly on the heels of this scene, it comes to seem that it is the burning of the preserved past in static, self-same, bound form that enables him to rekindle the past as it never had the chance to be.

In a manner reminiscent of the queer self-companionship that emerges near the end of Godfrey St. Peter's life, it ultimately becomes clear that one of the "old friends" to whom Preston must reintroduce himself is, in fact, himself.[69] If earlier in the story he identifies "philodendron" as involving a kind of self-love or even narcissism—if, that is, one is a tree—then the story as a whole uses etymology to catalyze in Preston himself a similarly queer kind of self-relation, a mode of relating intimately to the present-tense presence (that "now" of both this passage and the title[70]) of all he was, of all he (with Jim, at least) failed to become, and of all he might never have the chance to be. In the face of a situation that simultaneously intensifies and confounds the categories of life and death, etymology becomes a way of tracing all that *unlives* most intimately within, and conditions, the present: the virus replicating within a seropositive body, our

forgotten younger selves persisting within us, the dead languages illegibly shaping our present tense speech.

Strikingly, Preston finds Jim by calling his former architectural firm, claiming that he is the executor of the estate of a friend of Jim's who needs to pass along a possession that this friend wanted him to have. This proves to be both a lie and not; when the two finally reunite, "Preston handed a square box over to Jim, who opened it as if there was risk involved. Inside was a bowl of hand-carved, sandblasted glass, just larger than a softball. In its surface were philodendron leaves, carved against deep green glass" (58). Passing along a gift on behalf of a dead friend who is also the still-living self (self-executing[71]), having "divorce[d]" a self-same past by burning "love letters" in a sink (self-extinguishing), and having dared to speak of his own existence in the third person and the past tense, he *unlives* his life, allowing his unrealized past to re-emerge within and as the present.

Preston's reunion with Jim does not and cannot lead to any kind of stable, normative future. Jim is in an apparently monogamous relationship. Preston is terminally ill. But their brief sexual encounter—which, as Preston reflects, is likely to be his last, a realization rendered doubly powerful when he belatedly learns that he had long ago been Jim's first—makes legible a mode of emergence predicated on extinguishing, and a mode of persisting that, rather than linking the lived past to the lived present to the lived future, instead moves forward by placing the lived and the unlived—the living and the unliving—intimately side by side.

Indeed, throughout "Philostorgy," etymology, this practice typically associated with excavating a past, becomes surprisingly futural. It is not only that the work of etymology facilitates the emergence of Preston's unlived life, training him in a queer art of *unliving*, but also that it becomes a paradigm through which he traces how unliving itself proceeds in unpredicted ways. Although in the first scene of etymologizing, we see Preston shift from leaves to roots, he quickly reverses the process, tracing the root—*philo*—first in its spread across the English language and then, it seems, into the novel forms of "love" that emerge over the course of the story (the love of a tree for itself, the love of a man on the verge of extinction for his extant former self, the love of two women for their dying former roommate . . .). In the face of the disease's apparent foreclosure of futurity, etymology becomes a surprising site of both faith and possibility.

In an early scene in the story, Preston recalls that when he first attempted to etymologize "amniocentesis," "he pulled down the Oxford Bible instead of the etymological dictionary that it resembled. The passage he opened to read: 'You shall be like a watered garden. You shall be like a spring of water, those waters fail not'" (39). In a collection filled with Catholic characters, and in a story where the students' shared past was based on their time at a Jesuit university, Preston (whose name means "Priest's Son") seems to place his own faith in etymology, as the crossing of the dictionary and the bible begins to indicate. And if Lorna, thrice pregnant, and Roxy, who recently had an abortion, index the complex contours of reproductive futurity and its relationship to the replication of life, then the accidental yoking of etymology with the "watered garden"—especially when read alongside the thriving philodendron's roots and leaves—indicates the queer fertility of what remains to be unlived. Across the story, we see Preston less reaching for a future that can be achieved once and for all than tending the ground in which a promiscuous, transpersonal love—that wandering *philo*—can itself take root.

In the process, "Philostorgy" redefines its titular word, identifying "natural affection" as involving the love not of "parents for their offspring," but rather of friends and lovers for those with whom they share their "roots." Indeed, the scene of a dying man giving an inheritance to an ex-lover, much as he earlier allowed his former roommates "their moment of grief, as if it was his to give, a possession he could pass on"—might return us to Dixon's interest in etymology as a mode of, or model for, queer kinship and transmission. For Preston, a foundling who is also an endling, seems to be the end of his family line, and finds himself reckoning with the complications of origins, inheritance, and succession that result. Within the diegesis of the story, the work of self-etymologizing—of *unliving* his life back to its roots, of rekindling his intimacy with the friends and lover with whom he shared his past—reveals *philostorgy* to be located not within a chaste familial love but rather within the corporeal and erotic intimacies of his youth—as they were, as they never came to be, and as they persist in the face of his end.

And if we trace Preston's roots deeper still, we might find ourselves back in the attic study where we began, once again encountering (the original, unmodified) Godfrey St. Peter. For if we abstract our attention slightly, does it not seem possible to imagine that late-nineteenth-century boyhood self—

who “never married, never had a family,” who persists in and as the unrealized—growing into, or queerly begetting, the late-twentieth-century gay man who unlives his own life?[72] Can we not imagine Godfrey’s work of promiscuously “conjugating the verb ‘to love’” (“in society and solitude, with people, with books, with the sky and open country, in the lonesomeness of crowded city streets”)—which both extinguished that boyhood self and allowed him to remain as infinit(iv)e possibility—lasting into, and as, the wandering *philo-* of “Philostorgy”? This fanciful possibility—the conjured queer lineage of a character whose parentage is unknown—hearkens back, too, to a moment in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “White Glasses” that finds Michael Lynch “sandwiched in the crack between [his schoolteacher aunt] and her lifelong companion, wondering whether (after all, he was adopted) it might not be this Boston marriage whose offspring he somehow really, naturally was” (257). That such a meditation arises in the same paragraph where Sedgwick first mentions “the ontological crack between the living and the dead” suggests a species of queer kinship (and even queer reproduction) that emerges amidst terminal conditions—between Michael and his queer aunts in the (ontological) crack, for Godfrey as a citizen of the “world full of Augustas” in the attic study, in Preston redefining natural affection in the twilight of his life. Such kinship might prove “fictive” in more sense than one, insofar as part of what emerges is the queer affiliation—the “natural affection”—between works of fiction from nominally disparate moments in queer literary history. As *The Professor’s House* and “Philostorgy” prove to be queer cognates, related on the model of etymology, we sense another version of the kinship of the unliving—between fictional characters of queer literature, produced by authors writing through their, and their characters’, own extinction. Regionalism: Disappearing, with residue.[73] Regionalism, now somewhat less obscure.

Love at Last Sight: Promiscuous Care in a Time of Extinctions

There is, in *The Body and Its Dangers*, this collection preoccupied by dictionaries and their contents, only one moment when a definition appears directly: in “Succor,” a story that meditates on various configurations of

intimacy, lasting, and care. The story focuses on Kerch, a gay man with AIDS returning to Rome one final time before his death; the narrative toggles between his encounters with his own past/younger selves and accounts of his ongoing present in New York, where he offers his spare room to homeless men with AIDS in need of a place to die:

> *Promiscuous* (adj.), consisting of diverse things or members: miscellaneous, indiscriminate, mixed, motley, multifarious. Lacking a definite plan, purpose, or pattern: random, desultory, haphazard, irregular, spot.
>
> "You've brought dying people into your home," the magazine writer said to him, "people who had no place else to go. Why do you do it?"
>
> "I have a spare room," Kerch said.
>
> The spare room overlooked a sliver of park at the top of West End Avenue. A motley assortment of men—he had been indiscriminate in whom he let in—had died in the room, looking down at the statue in the park built in memory of Ida and Isidore Strauss, who had gone down in the *Titanic*. When he had moved into the rent-stabilized apartment as a graduate student, he thought the Strausses were sisters; to himself, he called the statue *Remembrance*. (121–122)

What ultimately emerges is a model of promiscuous care, one where the "way of life" facing extinction under AIDS persists in new form. For if "[a] motley assortment of men—he had been indiscriminate in whom he let in" are dying in his room, this evokes an earlier moment of indiscriminate intimacy, now seemingly lost. Later in the story, Kerch laments the difficulty of planning for a future that may never come to be: "'Is the moment basing my hopes in a future that may not even exist? . . . The only thing I know anymore is AIDS. I know more about this epidemic than my college major.'" The defrocked priest dying in his spare room replies: "'If you could have anything. . . . ,'" to which Kerch immediately replies: "'[s]ex with abandon.'" But what he has instead is care with abandon, and care amidst institutional and familial abandonment.[74]

Here, we witness a model of care fundamentally shaped by both the contours of the epidemic and the "ways of life" that it threatened—in other words, care for those at the edge of extinction by those at the edge of

extinction via practices themselves going extinct. Indeed, a careful rereading of AIDS literature demonstrates a model of care that creatively and intimately inhabits, rather than resists, the forms of loss and damage so perilously at stake in the crisis. If the totalizing extinctions threatened by AIDS are indexed by an alphabetic sweep—Monette's extinct "species from N to Z" and Preston's "address book . . . filled with the names of the dead . . . , one for practically every letter of the alphabet"—then, in a model of promiscuous care, the work of love takes on a parallel totality. For instance, the famously anonymous protagonist of Sontag's "The Way We Live Now" is visited by twenty-six friends, each one's first initial corresponding to a letter of the alphabet, from Aileen to Zack.

Near the end of the story, similarly, the characters' fear of the collateral damage that could result from their friend's treatment offers an unexpected model for the forms of intimacy that have emerged at his bedside:

> It doesn't matter about the treatment's side effects, Stephen said (when talking to Max), I don't know why you're so worried about that, every strong treatment has some dangerous side effects, it's inevitable, you mean otherwise the treatment wouldn't be effective, Hilda interjected, and anyway, Stephen went on doggedly, just because there *are* side effects doesn't mean he has to get them, or all of them, each one, or even some of them. That's just a list of all the possible things that could go wrong, because the doctors have to cover themselves, so they make up a worst-case scenario, but isn't what's happening to him, and to so many other people, Tanya interrupted, a worst-case scenario, a catastrophe no one could have imagined, it's too cruel, and isn't everything a side effect, quipped Ira, even *we* are all side effects, but we're not bad side effects, Frank said, he likes having his friends around, and we're helping each other, too. . . .

With this, we may find ourselves one final time back in Godfrey St. Peter's attic, asking after the *accidents*—and the accidental emergences—endemic to extinction. For in Sontag's story, friendship itself is a side effect of the illness, caretaking having yielded collateral benefit, both figurally and literally. Collateral, from the Latin *collateralis*, side by side, and *com*, with, together, + *lateralis*, of the side. As was the case in Jewett's "Miss

Tempy's Watchers," here we see caretakers sitting side by side, accidentally becoming something new by virtue of their proximity to death and to each other. Reflects Betsy of the "utopia of friendship . . . assembled around" the bedside: ". . . we are the family he's founded, without meaning to." If, in van Dooren's formulation, "we" are the "generations" overseeing species loss, then Sontag's story insists that so too are we being *generated* by the experience of extinction and loss, and their attendant practices of care. Perhaps here, too, we witness the forms of *becoming* at stake in this chapter: in a queer family "founded" by an endling, taking root in soil comprised of Jacques Khalip's "last things,"[75] its life, and liveliness, produced through its intimacy with extinction rather than emerging in contradistinction to it.

Indeed, to the extent that we see writing and care as paradigms of contagion in queer writing, what is shared is less often vitality than vulnerability itself. This insight also animates "Pedagogy of Buddhism," an essay which is itself deeply curious about the process of "learning how to die," where Sedgwick reflects that "the instructions for dying are actually the same as the instructions for working with the dying. Both teaching and learning in this situation involve the most passive and minimal of performances. . . . [I]t's a surprise, though it shouldn't be, that a nondoing verging on extinction would be the condition of possibility for *companionship* in these realms of unmaking."[76] Striking here is not only the fact that extinction, rather than the horizon of the dying, is the province of the caretaker, and not only that extinction, rather than a barrier to relation, is the very "condition of possibility for companionship," but also that what "verg[es] on extinction" is not (or not only) the dying—or living—person, but rather (or also) a practice of care.

Such a possibility also implicitly emerges within another text interested in extinction's collateral dimensions. In a gorgeous reading of how Rachel Carson's queer love with her intimate friend Dorothy Freeman was predicated on their shared love of veeries, Lida Maxwell ponders the way in which forms of human intimacy could be extinguished by species extinction. Following van Dooren's emphasis on multispecies entanglements and their related "forms of life," she asks: when "certain species of birds go extinct, might we also lose certain species of human love" (682)? But Sontag's attention to collateral benefit, like Preston's

practice of extinction-as-emergence, might lead us to invert Maxwell's structure, and ask whether, amidst the ravages of mass death and species extinction, we might *find*—in the sense of discover, but also in the sense of work to cultivate—certain species of human love. For if the "homosexual as species" emerges via cycles of extinction, then perhaps it should be no surprise that queer forms of care, queer *species* of love, emerge in the same way. Here, we can engage one last time the moment when Preston turns from the leaves of the philodendron to its roots, tracing all those words with which the plant shares its past: philharmonic, philosophy, philopolemic (rare), philter, philander, *philostorgy. Philo—love*—proves to be at the root of all things. If, to return to Matthew Chrulew, one of the tasks of the Anthropocene is to learn "how to love in a time of extinctions," it seems we're beginning to learn where to look.

And perhaps it is only natural to conclude with our own act of etymology, this practice that makes us akin—a kin—to Preston, that makes him our Greek and Latin teacher, and that finds us all, following Dixon, playing love's instruments. Species: from the Latin *specere*, to look at, see, behold. With this invocation of beholding, we might recall van Dooren's vital subjects, members of "generations that are *overseeing* the loss of so much of the diversity of living forms on this planet," Heise's "*affirmative visions* of the future" and Wallace-Wells's wish for an analogue to the Sixth Extinction that would give us "confidence in *staring it down*." For perhaps the alternative *species* of love—these alternative forms of sight—are found in AIDS literature: In Kerch's spare room, from which the strangers he takes in can *look down* at the statue of sister-lovers famous for their devotion in the face of death; in the mirror in the doctor's office, which *reflects* not just Preston's image but also his queer emergence ("This is you now"); in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo, where Kerch decides to allow his own reactivated past to propel an unknown future, because "[n]othing remained but *what remained to be seen*" (151); in the hospital bed in Sontag's "The Way We Live Now," where the protagonist's "eyes look[] dull, *extinguished*" while gazing at twenty-six companions who become accidental family; in the third of Paul Monette's *18 Elegies for Rog*, "Your Sightless Days": ". . . and what have I seen since your blindness my/love just that my love requires no eyes. . . ."

As these final two examples remind us, as did the "The *Times* As It Knows Us" narrator's etymologizing of *cytomegalovirus*, that opportunistic

infection that took so many gay men's eyesight before it (or other infections) took their lives, among the many things that AIDS literature demonstrates is the emotional power of love at *last sight*. In traditional accounts of extinction, "last sight" refers to the final glimpse the living catch of the endangered species before its death, a paradigm also familiar from the end of "Tom Outland's Story," when Roddy Blake's "head disappeared below the rim" (224) in the wake of his departure, taking with it the possibilities of homosocial friendship lived in and as their own time, and from the final line of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, when Dunnet Landing—this town nominally on the edge of extinction—is, itself "lost to sight."[77] But in AIDS literature, the last glimpse is so often *by* the endangered, losing sight (and *species*-being) as part of the "slow unraveling" of life. In *Borrowed Time*, for instance, Monette recalls that he and Roger "[w]ere not big fans of future talk. . . . We went after the windows of time with renewed intensity, seeing by whatever light was left" (286–287). And lest this AIDS-era echo of Coviello's "twilit moment *before* the arrival or calcifying of the terms of sexuality" (7), "those long, last moments before" (11) the queer extinction event known as the birth of homosexuality, seem wholly figural, Monette continues: "And if Rog was something of an invalid now, held down by his lower energy and the shadow tunnel of his one good eye, all of that could be wiped aside by the briefest glimpse of what remained. We were walking one bright noontime on Harold Way, about fifty feet short of the Liberace gates, when Roger turned and peered at me. 'I see you,' he said softly, his lips curling in a smile" (283). Amidst this shadow tunnel, this fading luminescence, is the possibility of making a life—of loving and unliving—within "the briefest glimpse of what remained." Perhaps it is by tracing all the ways there are to *behold—specere*—that we can index, for the first and last time, all the ways there still are to hold and *be held*. Philostorgy, now not so obscure.

4

Cruising the Planet

The Sexual Ecology of Samuel Delany

In the final paragraph of his 2002 essay "Sociability and Cruising," Leo Bersani concludes his discussion of impersonal intimacy and promiscuous attachments with an unexpected turn to ecology: "Let's call this [ethical model predicated on ascetic practices] an ecological ethics," he suggests, "one in which the subject, having willed its own lessness, can live less invasively in the world."[1] Cited out of context, there is perhaps little surprising about this statement, particularly its final clause. Environmental(ist) rhetoric, especially in its most familiar incarnations, often invites us to live less invasively—to "leave no trace," to cite one popular backcountry adage, or to "take only pictures, leave only footprints," to cite another. Ethical relationality is thus commonly predicated on restraint, on learning to make do with less, on compromising acquisitive or consumptive desires for the sake of an often enigmatic—but protectively policed—"common good." Yet queer theory, especially the antisocial vein for which Bersani is known, challenges the foundations (and foundational status) of both that "common" and that "good"; invested not in chaste restraint but in polymorphous pleasures, not in the steadying pull of biological reproduction and its familiarly (and familially) accompanying "future generations" but in "the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force,"[2] and not in conserving or sustaining present ways of life but rather in rupturing norms, the field seems to undermine many of the logics that environmentalism holds dear.

And certainly Bersani himself is not a theorist known for endorsing environmentalism's familiar paradigms of responsibility; after all, this is the writer who, in *Homos*, opened a chapter by asking, skeptically, "Should a homosexual be a good citizen?" and then went on to suggest that "given the rage for respectability so visible in gay life today, some useful friction—and

as a result some useful thought—may be created by questioning the compatibility of homosexuality with civic service."[3] Furthermore, the practice at stake in this piece of Bersani's—cruising—seems to signal the death knell for any reading of the essay as modeling an ecological ethic, regardless of its final turn. For the encounters involved in cruising—temporary, casual, anonymous—seem to have little in common with the practices associated with meaningful planetary stewardship.

But what if we took seriously Bersani's casual remark, and considered the relationship between cruising and environmental care? In what follows, I seek less to account for Bersani's claim[4] than to expand upon it, to consider how cruising, broadly conceived—as erotic practice, relational mode, and habit of attention[5]—might inspire an ecological ethic more deeply attuned to our often transient, fundamentally impersonal intimacies with the human, nonhuman, and elemental strangers that constitute both our environment and ourselves.[6] In so doing, I implicitly return to the scenes of promiscuity that have appeared in the previous two chapters—Godfrey St. Peter's process of "conjugating the verb 'to love' . . . in society and solitude, with people, with books, with the sky and open country in the lonesomeness of crowded city streets,"[7] Preston's wandering prefix *philo-*, and Kerch's work of promiscuous care—and demonstrate the relevance of such "miscellaneous, indiscriminate, mixed, motley, . . . random, desultory, . . . irregular" intimacies[8] to environmental relation.[9] In the process, I ask what environmental care, seemingly definitionally invested in long-term effects, can learn from the avowedly temporary encounters involved in cruising, from modes of intimacy that don't orient themselves toward the future and seemingly aren't intended to endure.[10]

To pursue such an inquiry, I look not only to Bersani's work but also—and primarily—to Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, two "extended essays" (one autoethnographic, the other traditionally academic) that narrate experiences in the porn theaters of Times Square between 1975 and 1995 while theorizing their broader social significance.[11] In offering a model of persistence that incorporates, rather than being defined against, forgetting and fading, and a model of causality predicated on casual practices and collateral effects, Delany traces how the effects of temporary encounters spread athwart lives and environments, unfurling in illegible, unintentional, and wholly non-linear ways. As his text brushes up

next to Bersani's, and next to contemporary environmental writings, it suggests a mode of environmental stewardship predicated less on direct(ed) investment than on ambient affects, impersonal encounters, and non-teleological practices of care.[12] Ultimately, I will argue, in tracing how the consequences of transient, anonymous encounters disperse throughout urban space and across various measures of time, Delany offers us new ways to understand the "politicized intimacy with other beings"[13] that constitutes contemporary environmental relation as such. The result is an ethic that acknowledges the extent to which ecological entanglement far more resembles the queer relationality of cruising than it does the other (more "proper"[14]) relational paradigms to which we so often analogize it.

Given that cruising is a deliberate practice, one that courts the forms of transience that the conditions at the heart of my other chapters impose, this argument may seem to depart both conceptually and affectively from those that have come before. In many respects, such a shift is intentional. Because this project aims to consider the ramifications of queer life's constitutive intimacy with futurelessness, it seems important to engage the affirmative cultural practices that have emerged as a result of this intimacy; so doing reminds us that the non-futural rhythms of queer life are the result not only of duress but also of desire, and expands our understanding of what it means—and how it feels—for ethical relation to bracket longevity. That said, insofar as practices and cultures of casual sexual contact were another casualty of the AIDS epidemic, constituting a "way of life" no less endangered than were the lives of the gay men whose poems and short stories I discussed in Chapter 3, this chapter, too, attends to the fragility of lasting.[15] As Christopher Bollen writes, in *TSRTSB* Delany "captured the vital, lived history of the urban stretch right at the moment it was being systematically dismantled"[16]—a formulation that recalls Peter Coviello's account of Henry James at the turn of the twentieth century, witnessing and living through "the loss of nothing less than an entire world."[17] As Delany watches the institutions of his everyday life disappear, taken not only by the disease but also—and more perniciously—by the developers who capitalized on its spread,[18] he demonstrates how the extinctions catalyzed by AIDS continue, even as the emergence of antiretroviral therapies altered the epidemiological course of infection itself. These two dimensions of Delany's project ultimately prove inseparable, insofar as the non-futural

practices of cruising yield a model for navigating, and mounting a political response to, the narrowing of those practices' own future.[19] Somewhat unexpectedly, *TSRTSB* thus demonstrates how terminality and extinction themselves become a way of life; in narrating and formalizing the specific interplay of transience and persistence at stake in the sociosexual cultures of Times Square, he demonstrates how queer ongoingness is predicated on inhabiting, rather than preventing, the way things come to an end.

As this (re)turn to terminality and extinction begins to suggest, *TSRTSB* also indexes the queer persistence of the literatures that I have discussed throughout this project. Published in 1999, the book can be read as an example of AIDS writing composed outside the epicenter of the epidemic, and its ethicopolitical concerns reflect such positioning.[20] For Delany's political elegy for the shuttered theaters of Times Square demonstrates how the infrastructural and socioecological effects of AIDS continue to ramify across urban environments, while also subtly tracing the lasting of individual casual sexual encounters—and of a culture of public sex in Times Square—beyond their, and its, nominal end. Considerably more unexpectedly, in its attention to ambient and resolutely impersonal intimacies, *TSRTSB* also rewrites the spinsterly relational paradigms of Sarah Orne Jewett's 1896 work *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in erotic terms. Or perhaps it simply makes newly legible the terms that are already present in the reticent regionalist text. For the very first thing that we learn about Jewett's insistently anonymous narrator, a "lover of Dunnet Landing," is that she initially encountered the coastal town "two or three summers before in the course of a yachting cruise" (2). If we take that happenstance seafaring posture—cruise, *v. (intransitive)*: To sail to and fro over some part of the sea without making for a particular port or landing-place—as anticipating its urban erotic counterpart—*v. (transitive and intransitive)* To walk or drive about (the streets) in search of a casual sexual (*esp.* homosexual) partner; to solicit (a person), entice[21]—then we might reread the *Pointed Firs* sketches as offering a portrait of what it means to cruise a place and its people (two categories that, in Jewett's work, can never be wholly disaggregated).[22] And such a crossing proves to go both ways.[23] In Delany's preface to *TSRTSB*, he describes his method as resembling a sailor's periplum; the juxtaposed essays on public sex that comprise the volume are, in his words, "two attempts by a single navigator to describe what the temporal coastline and the lay of the land looked like and felt

like. . . . From the most peremptory landings, these pieces register impressions and ideas as they occurred to this navigator, somewhat storm-tossed over thirty-odd years" (xviii). We might thus read Delany's book—with its "peremptory landings," sketches of temporary encounters, understanding of anonymity as the ground of relation, and faith in ambient companioning—as a queer echo of Jewett's, albeit transposed into a quite different key.[24] And cruising itself might, finally, become an unexpected descriptor for a model of literary reading—and of literary genealogy—that allows the centuries to cross, and cognate texts to fleetingly meet, without codifying or monumentalizing their relation in turn.

Cruising's Queer Ecology

Drawing on the work of sociologist Georg Simmel, Bersani's essay rehearses the fundamental distinction between society, predicated on interests and identities, and sociability, in which an impersonal mode of being facilitates something akin to "pure relationality" and fosters the feeling "of association as such" (45).[25] Sociability, according to Bersani's account of Simmel, "abstract[s] the relational from concrete relations," granting access to "the pleasure of the associative process," to "a pure relationality" that dwells "beyond or before the satisfaction of particular needs or interests" (45–46). While such bracketing of the personal—which, in Bersani's account, entails the renunciation of both possession and any acquisitive impulse—requires a sacrifice, it is also "pleasurable," its "satisfaction inherent"; for within sociability, each one of us, like the woman who becomes one of Simmel's examples, is "'not completely [one]self'" but rather "only an element in a formally constituted gathering" (46, 47). "It is as if there is a happiness inherent in not being entirely ourselves," Bersani suggests, provocatively, "in being 'reduced' to an impersonal rhythm. . . ." (47). And like the self, no longer driven by acquisitive impulse, this happiness or pleasure "does not serve an interest, satisfy a passion, or fulfill a desire. It is an intransitive pleasure intrinsic to a certain mode of existence, to a self-subtracted being" (48). As "intransitive" begins to suggest, such pleasure involves the ongoing relinquishing of objects. "[T]he fundamental rhythm of sociability," Bersani insists, is 'association and separation.'. . . . We live rhythmically only if we renounce possession" (47); likewise, "[t]he danger associated with cruising

is not that it reduces relations to promiscuous sex, but rather that the promiscuity may stop. Few things are more difficult than to block our interest in others, to prevent our connection to them from degenerating into a 'relationship'" (57).

Although cruising and sociability themselves are non-teleological practices, Bersani wishes for his theorization of the terms to reach beyond itself; he insists that attending seriously to cruising "is not a question of demonstrating that certain outrageous practices are really taking place within the parameters of a traditional ethics, but rather of specifying the ways in which those practices may or may not require us to elaborate new ethical vocabularies" (60). If one of the goals of the current chapter is to pursue such an elaboration in ecological terms, then in many respects Delany has beaten us—and Bersani himself—to the punch. Although *TSRTSB* precedes "Sociability and Cruising" by three years, it often reads as a response to Bersani's variously articulated challenges, not only in its articulation of "new ethical vocabularies" but also in its historically and materially specific attention to the culture of cruising in the "old" Times Square.

Indeed, for Delany, eroticism, sexual contact, and open expressions of desire are fundamental to the democratic potential of the spaces in which we dwell. Throughout *TSRTSB*, he establishes the links—or, to use one of his own favorite terms, "propinquity"—between casual sexual contact and casual non-sexual encounters; while he is not invested in the "environment" *per se*, his thinking is consistently ecological, insofar as it takes seriously the capacity of seemingly casual, localized, and contingent relational practices to circulate throughout the broader social milieu in which they transpire.[26] We thus might argue that *TSRTSB* theorizes a kind of sexual ecology, a term that I borrow from Gabriel Rotello, whose 1997 book of the same name has been deemed "the *Silent Spring* of the AIDS epidemic."[27] *Sexual Ecology* analyzes AIDS as an ecological phenomenon, arguing that the "enemy" is not the disease itself but rather the conditions that facilitate its spread. Sexual ecology, as Rotello defines it, thus "consists of the entire spectrum of causes and effects that influence the spread of sexually transmitted diseases"; as he goes on to insist, "[t]o begin the process of envisioning a sustainable gay lifestyle that can encourage gay liberation and

avoid epidemic disease over the long haul, we have to learn to think ecologically about sex" (16, 189).

TSRTSB, I would argue, also helps us "learn to think ecologically about sex"—not, as Rotello would have it, by tracing the contextual contours of a sexually transmitted disease so as to limit its spread, but rather by revealing the way that intimacy, community, and care themselves spread in the spatiotemporal wake of casual sexual activity. Whereas Rotello's response to HIV mandates a largely prophylactic and risk-averse approach to erotic life—including a commitment to monogamy and a reduction in cruising—Delany, inversely, advocates an embrace of contact, positing it as fundamental to the wellbeing not only of individuals but also, and more profoundly, of the urban environment itself. The difference between the writers' approaches, then, might have repercussions not only for the status of cruising but also, importantly, for the orientation of environmental activism. Where Rotello seeks to change casual sexual practice by aligning it with a chaste, "mature," and restrained environmentalism, Delany, I want to suggest, can inspire a change in environmental ethics by inviting us to attend to the impersonal, collateral, and insistently ambient effects of casual encounters.[28] Ultimately, by attending closely to "a complex of interlocking systems and subsystems" (xx), to the way in which "social interchanges of information and material occur in various forms of social nets" (122), and to how interclass contact becomes "the lymphatic system of a democratic metropolis" (199), he encourages us "to look not so much at social objects and social monuments but to observe, analyze, and value a whole range of social relationships" (177).

Among the relationships that concern Delany is the relationship between practices of cruising—or public sex more generally—and the forms of spontaneous cross-class contact fundamental to the social vitality of urban spaces. The distinction that Bersani (via Simmel) draws between society and sociability finds its analog in Delany's differentiation between the roles that two forms of social practice—networking and contact—play in civic life. Networking, like society, is animated by interest, by identity, by motive—and often, consequently, by affinity or likeness. It "tends to be professional and motive-driven. . . . [It] crosses lines only in the most vigilant manner . . . [and] is heavily dependent on institutions to promote the necessary propinquity (gyms, parties, twelve-step programs, conferences . . .), where those with the requisite social skills can maneuver"

(129). Contact (a term that he adapts from the work of Jane Jacobs), by contrast,[29] is "more broadly social," amenable to chance and surprise and difference alike:

> Contact is the conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you while the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register. It is the pleasantries exchanged with a neighbor who has brought her chair out to take some air on the stoop. . . . It can be the conversation that starts with any number of semiofficials or service persons—mailman, policeman, librarian, store clerk or counter person. As well, it can be two men watching each other masturbating together in adjacent urinals of a public john—an encounter that, later, may or may not become a conversation. Very importantly, contact is also the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as "casual sex" in public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, . . . on street corners with heavy hustling traffic, and in the adjoining motels or the apartments of one or another participant, from which nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime may spring, not to mention the conversation of a john with a prostitute or hustler encountered on one or another street corner or in a bar—a relation that, a decade later, has devolved into a smile or a nod, even when (to quote Swinburne) "You have forgotten my kisses,/And I have forgotten your name." (123–124)

Importantly, cruising here is just one example—if a privileged one—of the routine forms of spontaneous contact between strangers that Delany understands to have been compromised by the sanitizing "redevelopment" of Times Square and the privatization of urban space more broadly. Indeed, the rhetorical power of the passage emerges in how scenes often understood as constitutive of the daily culture of any American city come to touch the non-normative, "fringe" practices of public sex, and how scenes specific to 1970s and 1980s New York burgeon within (or diffuse into) a more conventional portrait of American urbanity. The passage thus suggests not only that contact is what cruising becomes as it disperses across time, space, and publics to become a common way of life—but also that scenes of public sex, if not a prerequisite for these more familiar, banal encounters,

nevertheless index contact's own (im)possibility. At its best, Delany suggests, a city is a realm where, knowingly or not, we all find ourselves beckoned to cruise.[30]

Thus, the passage as a whole represents, in microcosm, the most powerful aspects of cruising's queer ecology. First, we might notice the complicated temporality in which contact transpires. Meaningful—and fleeting—encounters typically take place in spaces of suspension. They happen "*while* the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register." They happen as the neighbor takes a break on the stoop or as semiofficials forestall various responsibilities—dilating, however gently, the time of the task. They happen in the marginal furrows of society, in the space of "waste" and pleasure as opposed to the time of duty or (re)production. Indeed, whereas networking is instrumental (Delany's paradigmatic example is writers angling for book deals at conferences), the future of contact is starkly impersonal: "I have forgotten your name."[31] Contact and cruising are realms in which anonymity and impersonality can be the ground of intimacy rather than barriers to it, where non-knowledge of our variably significant others can be a state that endures.

Likewise, rather than simply emphasizing the fleetingness of casual encounters, Delany's account of cruising changes how longevity looks and feels. (What does it mean, his text often implicitly asks, for something to last?) Forgetting is invoked not as a sign of disappearance but as an indicator of persistence. Yoked together in Delany's final sentence are the possibility of friendships "*lasting* for decades or a lifetime" and one-time encounters that have "*devolved* into a smile or a nod." The lasting and the devolving are not opposed, but rather are parts of the same sociosexual ecology. What they have in common, as other scenes from the book illustrate more fully, is the way in which they—the fading, the remaining, the devolving, the burgeoning—suffuse the spaces in which they take place, and make urban life livable.

At the same time that Delany's points are insistent, they are also necessarily non-programmatic. For he advocates not particular actions or practices but rather a posture of openness to chance, a willingness to admit that we cannot possibly know what will come of any given encounter. The passage above, perhaps unsurprisingly, is awash in language of contingency: not only the "may" and "may not" through which Delany

traces the uncertain contours of consequence, but also the repeated refrain "it can be," which gestures toward the impossibility of predicting what forms contact might or will take. We cannot know in advance what will last or fade, how we may feel lasting traces of the fading, or how forgetting itself may become a form of relation. We do not know how what "devolve[s]" may still permeate our days—not as an absence experienced with longing or regret or melancholy but as a diminished persistence that, having become more part of our substance (and our surroundings) than of our memories, grounds our daily experience of the world.

Thus, while there is, importantly, nothing preordained about these beginnings—Delany permits himself to inhabit, to again invoke Sedgwick's account of terminal friendship, "the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further"[32]—there is also nothing preventing them from yielding social consequence, direct or indirect. Part of the point is that these beginnings are typically not fraught with expectation; they are not the start of a familiar narrative, but rather episodes open to and predicated on indirect effects. The paradigms of intimacy and relationality that concern Delany are often invisible until they reach a threshold of legibility. We forget about many of those whom we encounter until we see them again on a street corner, until chance brings them back into our life narrative and begins to articulate the ways in which they (like the boyhood Godfrey St. Peter within the adult man, like the infinitive within the conjugated verb, like the Latin root within the English word) may have been there—invisibly, anonymously, ambiently, materially—all along.

Ecological Lessness; or, Anthro-decentric Erotics

The anonymity central to cruising is, for both Bersani and Delany, not an exceptional condition but rather a constitutive one. For it is not simply others who remain anonymous, but also, importantly, ourselves. Such identitarian lessness is, for Bersani, the source of sociability's pleasure and, for Delany, the wellspring of queer urban life. To understand lessness as the site of an ethically impersonal pleasure—or of a pleasurably impersonal ethics—is to begin to trace the contours of its environmental significance. As the opening to this chapter indicated, paradigms of lessening are hardly unfamiliar to mainstream environmentalism. But whereas the latter's

investment in lessness relates almost entirely to the actions that we take (or fail to take) under the banner of "restraint," Bersani's psychoanalytic lessness is ontological, pertaining to the realm of being, not doing. Indeed, while Bersani suggests that there can be a happiness "inherent in not being entirely ourselves," the logic of environmentalism often urges us to be *more ourselves* (often by doing, consuming, and demanding *less*), turning planetary stewardship into an extension and intensification of identitarian commitments.[33]

Furthermore, even when environmental stewardship is not so specifically identitarian, those imploring us to action tend to rely on language of shared values, appealing both to who "we" are and to whom "we" most want to be. The anthology *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, for instance, interpellates its readers as members of an existing moral community: "What is missing [in our environmental consciousness] is the moral imperative, the conviction that assuring our own comfort at terrible cost to the future is not worthy of us as moral beings. . . . Ethics is certainly about how to act. But in an important sense, ethics is also about who to be. What is the best a human being can be?"[34] The text understands there to be a fundamental homology between *what we do* and *who we are*, between our status as agents and our identities as beings. It thus leaves little room for practices or postures that aren't immediately rolled into identity—or for an understanding of action that isn't embroiled in intention, agency, and aim. Furthermore, in the paradigm advocated by both the *Moral Ground* editors and their contributors, community is predicated on resemblance; stewardship is our shared project because we are moral in the same way, value the same things, and strive toward the same ends. Theirs is a politics of recognition, one that knows in advance not only what it seeks but also who its allies are and where its affinities lie.

Such a stance is, perhaps, the logical extension of environmental writing and activism's broader tendency to personalize and personify the planet in order to (urge us to) invest in its endurance. But rather than finding increasingly personal lines of appeal, we might instead seek to develop an environmental ethic that depersonalizes and perhaps even de-faces human action—precisely in order to begin reckoning with those queer animacies and agencies that constitute the natural world. For when we relate to "the environment," we are relating to—and imbricated with—the inanimate, the

geologic, the distant, the invisible, the systemic, the strange. The resulting entanglements are distinctly *not* personal, distinctly *not* symmetrical, distinctly *not* human. But this does not mean that these same relationships are not intimate; as scholars of toxicity have demonstrated, "the environment is not located somewhere out there but is always as close as one's own skin. . . ."[35] And so, as many thinkers across the "nonhuman turn" have suggested, we need a model for thinking our intimacy with those entities that, no matter how consubstantial we are with them, we can never fully know and that make no recognizable attempts to know us.

Such a model already exists within these theorizations of cruising, which seek—to borrow Bersani's language—to "conceptualize a sociality no longer imprisoned within identitarian ideologies."[36] Bersani's and Delany's accounts of impersonal queer relation thus can help us develop the dis-anthropocentric ecological imagination—or the practice of anthro-decentric thought—that our present environmental circumstances seem to demand: not by articulating the forms of queer agency immanent to nominally "inanimate" entities but rather by demonstrating how human relations are themselves already more dis-anthropocentric than we are wont to think. For, as Jane Bennett insists, not only is matter vibrant, but, due to our entanglement and mutual constitution with it, and due to "the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap," "we are also nonhuman."[37] If, in elucidating the implications of such a claim, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman cast matter as embodying "a form of 'emergent' agency that is combined and interferes with every 'intentional' human agency," meaning that "none of our intentional acts is limited to the sphere of 'pure' intentionality,"[38] and if "geophilia," in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's account of stone's own vibrancy, "recognizes matter's *promiscuous desire* to affiliate with other forms of matter,"[39] then it is also worth recognizing that Delany's model of intimacy might, however counterintuitively, do much the same.

In making such a claim, I am extending the insights of other queer thinkers who have gestured toward the link between antisocial queer and anthro-decentric projects. In "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?," Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, cataloging histories of queer work that "unsettle . . . default forms of humanness," cite Bersani's insistence that "'we allow sex to become what we most fear, a site for the 'breakdown of

the human itself'" (187). Likewise, Nicole Seymour, also engaging Bersani's work, suggests that "concepts of self-shattering and anti-sociality might open out onto . . . queer interest in the natural world. After all, a measure of self-renunciation and anti-sociality is central to many if not most forms of environmentalism, including ecocriticism; the renunciation of anthropocentrism and the adoption of biocentric or ecocentric viewpoints are veritable prerequisites for participation in either."[40] By shifting my own attention from Bersani's approach to cruising to Delany's, I mean to offer an anthro-decentric ethic that brackets identity and distributes agency while refusing to flatten human differences or abstract impersonal relation from its material conditions of possibility.[41] No one in the theaters, Delany included, is unmarked by race or class or sexuality.[42] However, within the erotic scenes that Delany describes, they relinquish any proprietary claim to those markers, and any liberal humanist inclination toward a model of selfhood predicated on self-possession. Consequently, *TSRTSB* might help us engage what Luciano and Chen describe as "the tension between universalizing and localizing impulses in . . . anthro-decentric thought" (192). As the book rhythmically moves between the erotic particularities of the porn theater and the more generalized sociabilities of the grocery store, the details of queer subculture and the broader truisms of urban life, attention to the (erotic, professional, relational) role and attention to the individual who temporarily occupies it, it charts a course between universalizing and particularizing gestures, in part by refusing to settle into or stake a claim to either one.

Perhaps what *TSRTSB* offers us, then, is an alternate way not only to think through our relationship to the material strata and cycles of the environment but also to heed the kinds of non-normative (in)animacies that already characterize humanness—and social ecology—itself.[43] Such a possibility might return us to Bersani's and Delany's insistence on an impersonal lessness. For insofar as scholars like Stacy Alaimo, in her model of "transcorporeality" (11), and Chen, in their analysis of queer "intoxification,"[44] insist that we are constituted by—and co-constituting of—all that surrounds us, they help us to loosen our proprietary claims to autonomous subjectivity. They thus demonstrate that, precisely in being more *than* ourselves, we are already *less ourselves* in an identitarian sense.[45] And so maybe it is time to let our minds (like the cruiser's eye)

wander, to ask what it would mean for environmentalism to take its existing investment in doing less and transmute it into an investment in—or at least comfort with—being less. Perhaps such an approach would resemble life in the moviehouses Eros I, the New Adonis, or the Capri. For in Delany's account, when identities are bracketed and selves are lessened and claims are weakened, what is left is a mode of relation predicated on act and gesture, where what one does (either idiosyncratically or characteristically) is not immediately commensurate with who one is understood to be.

This paradigm precludes neither investment nor care; rather, it simply depersonalizes them. In the anthropological essay that constitutes the first half of *TSRTSB*, Delany makes a rare turn to his life beyond Times Square, recalling his mother's stroke, which left her "a creature wholly alien yet recognizable in fifty little ways—a hand gesture, a shake of the head, a sudden single phrase ('I know') muttered thirty-seven times, a smile, a moue—as the subject . . . she once was" (52). If a stroke inaugurates a falling off from full subjectivity, leaving in its wake a once familiar person now recognizable only in those "fifty little [gestural] ways," then life in the moviehouses suggests a model of relationality *predicated on* those tendencies, one where gesture or act is not understood as a trace of the whole subjectivity it fails to reach but rather as itself the sufficient ground of familiarity.[46] The men in the theaters, "fixtures" (73) and "regulars" (15), are less characters than they are characteristic habits or postures. They are sometimes professions and names and proclivities, but rarely more than that; the trajectory of intimacy that burgeons in the theaters leads one to "recognize . . . faces" (32) and develop "passing acquaintances" (33), just as casual conversation in the supermarket checkout line permits one to "[add] a voice to a face now and again encountered in the neighborhood" (124). And these scenes of relation are not simply structurally parallel but mutually informing. For the practice of cruising, with its affirmative relationship to anonymity and impersonality, yields an ethics through which Delany can respond to his mother in the wake of her stroke, the theaters offering a space in which he can relearn how to relate to her, and to the forms of diminishment that her condition entails. Further, if his mother's stroke defamiliarizes their relation, then so too do the theaters defamiliarize paradigms of care and belonging. For from these forms of minimal knowledge emerge "everything from basic intra-neighborhood

‘pleasantness’ to heroic neighborly assistance in times of catastrophe” (156). As Delany reflects:

> Despite moments of infatuation on both sides, these were not love relationships. . . . They were encounters whose most important aspect was that mutual pleasure was exchanged—an aspect that, yes, colored all their other aspects, but that did not involve any sort of life commitment. . . . More than half were single encounters. But some lasted over weeks; others for months; still others went on a couple of years. And enough endured over a decade or more to give them their own flavor, form, and characteristic aspects. You learned something about these people (though not necessarily their name, or where they lived, or what their job or income was); and they learned something about you. (56–57)

Here, partial (metonymic) knowledge is not a step on the way to “completeness” but rather a mode of ethical relation all its own. What Delany invests in, then, is less any one of these men (although he does develop ongoing relationships with some) than the broader culture that they collectively inhabit and the pleasure that they share.[47] Throughout, Delany attends less to beings or things than to the medial dimension—the common dimension of contact—in which such encounters transpire, and in which their effects persist.[48] Whereas much work in the “nonhuman turn” heeds the intimacy between the human and the inhuman by bringing the backgrounded environment into the foreground of our attention, Delany does so by staying with a sex practice that renders every body—and every sexual object—less “itself” than part of the ambient erotic landscape. In this shift toward an objectless (or intransitive) mode of care, Delany’s account of cruising begins to feel more directly ecological, insofar as it prioritizes the atmosphere in which relationality itself inheres.

Indeed, the effects that such contact produces are ambient, dispersed, diffuse, incomplete. They embody the “field and force” that “human beings [can] share”; they have “flavor” and “form”; the pleasure foundational to them “color[s]” all other aspects of the encounters and their milieu. Rather than relating to one another dyadically, and rather than being discrete nodes in a social network, these men *environ* one another, their relationships

important precisely insofar as they fail to be permanent, proper, or proprietary. As such, they seem to exemplify what Bersani, writing with Adam Phillips, deems "impersonal intimacy": an "experience of exchange, of intimacy, of desire indifferent to personal identity."[49] Such a description may apply not only to bodies in the context of cruising, but also to environmental relation, insofar as the environment is in constant, impersonal contact with us.

Rather than personalize our relationship to the planet, then, we might learn to engage it *disinterestedly*, a term that indexes the place where dis-anthropocentric logics and impersonal affects meet. For as we have already seen, for Bersani, what sociability and cruising bracket is, above all, "interest" (in the sense of both social advantage and stable or enduring attraction). Indeed, to cruise is not just to resist stability—in the sense of letting the movement stop, in the sense of resolving the promiscuous verb "to love" into the stable identity "the lover"[50]—but also to resist the proprietary claims we have over each other, and over ourselves. Whereas Seymour engages antisocial queer thought in order to advocate a model of environmental stewardship that "act[s] *in the interests* of nameless, faceless individuals to which one has no biological, familial, or economic ties whatsoever" (11), Delany's and Bersani's work insists that to truly develop an impersonal mode of relation requires us to act in the name of something other than interests, and to adopt a posture other than *interestedness*. For although it would be an overstatement to claim that Delany doesn't have erotic tastes or proclivities, part of the pleasure of cruising (as the nautical definition also reminds us) is the pleasure of not being particular—something we saw, too, in Barnett's "Succor," where Kerch's care (like his previous intimacies) was powerfully "indiscriminate."[51] As *TSRTSB*, no less than "Succor," makes eminently clear, to move through the world with affirmative disinterest is hardly to abolish care, invite disregard, or flatten experience.

And here we can sense the link between the ethics of the book and the frank, detailed way in which Delany describes those indiscriminate encounters in the theater—a mode of narration that refuses to yoke its politics to the forms of respectability prerequisite to gay inclusion. To understand his work as avowedly "improper" (*in* + *proprius*) or "inappropriate" (*in* + *appropriare*[52]) is to heed the inseparability of

Delany's challenge to the morality (the *propriety*) that animates many insistently personalizing calls to environmental action and his refusal of proprietary logics more generally. To find an ecological ethic in what Robert Reid-Pharr describes as "detailed, evocative, poignant, sometimes shocking, sometimes sad, and often naughty descriptions of the porn theaters"[53] thus is not only to further shift the affective register of environmentalism away from its often-moralizing earnestness but also to disaggregate environmental(ist) acts from the registers of identity—of self-possession—with which they are typically associated.

Let me turn such observations into an invitation: What if we insisted upon a model of environmental care oriented less toward who we are (or wish to be) than toward what makes us up, where we position ourselves, the gestures and entanglements that come to define us, and, yes, the things that we (fail to) do?[54] Such a change not only could help us to understand stewardship as a more impersonal phenomenon but also could articulate the ways in which those who are not likely to engage deliberately with questions of the environment are in fact already acting ecologically, whether positively or adversely. What if environmental stewardship were understood as a dispersed set of practices, affiliations, affects, and animacies—some long-lasting, some fleeting, some deliberate, some entirely accidental? What would it look like to deem a broader range of practices "environmental" and to deem fewer—or, alternatively, far more—people "environmentalists"? For under a model where practices and postures are irreducible to identity,[55] we could embrace the ethical importance of a casual environmentalism, an amateur environmentalism, a playful environmentalism, and even an accidental environmentalism[56]—all of them predicated on an ecological understanding that the casual is no less powerful, and ultimately no less *causal*, than are the deliberate and the premeditated.

Casual Causality; or, Calculated Drift

To argue that we could practice an environmentalism divested from deliberate long-term aims is, perhaps, to commit sacrilege. As we have seen, although trying to articulate truisms about the environmental movement is a losing battle, if occasionally a heuristically necessary one,

most environmentalists would agree that their commitment to the planet is a long-term affair. And not an affair, really, but more like a marriage: for better or worse, until death do us part—and beyond. *TSRTSB*'s most obvious challenge to such an imperative comes in its embrace of the fleeting; however, its more powerful intervention may involve its elaboration of paradigms of indirect consequence and lateral causality. For environmentalism's investment in longevity tends to be predicated upon a faith (or, at least, a hope) that causality functions in a largely knowable, linear way—that careful, intentional acts will yield their desired outcome, and that specific futural goals are achievable in turn. By contrast, Delany, ostensibly bracketing questions of permanence and longevity, demonstrates paradigms of ethical engagement that inhere in the absence of readily recognized endurance and teaches us how to position ourselves relative to forms of consequence whose bounds exceed certainty, intention, and control.

As he inhabits an intransitive posture, one that cruises and wanders rather than being determined by particular goals or ends, Delany attends to co-incidence as such; in so doing, he traces the way in which the overlap of the casual and the causal conditions urban sociability and ethical relations alike, suggesting that we make and remake our worlds precisely out of consequences that we couldn't possibly intend or anticipate, and that we perhaps cannot even experience as such. Just as his urban encounters are sometimes fleeting and sometimes more permanent (and sometimes recur, enduring precisely *in* or *as* their temporariness), the results of contact are, for him, sometimes positive and sometimes deleterious, sometimes life-altering and sometimes utterly inconsequential, and most often somewhere in between. The exact nature of an encounter's significance is frequently indeterminate, both because he is often unaware of his interlocutor's path after they part ways ("not all tales end in premature death or incarceration. For most, indeed, we never learn an end at all" [48]) and because causality itself is often delayed, indirect, and unpredictable, particularly in the context of these casual encounters. Indeed, Delany insists that it is often precisely *because* encounters or interactions are fleeting, minimal, and casual that their consequence can build.

To insist that causality is always at least in part casual is not to advocate that we renounce deliberateness and welcome whatever may come to pass. Rather, Delany's model suggests that we stop reifying outcomes (and the

presumed predictability of a course of action that could help us reach them) and focus on cultivating the conditions of possibility for—and the forms of solidarity prerequisite to—transformative social change. For while he repeatedly emphasizes that "[t]he nature of the social practices [he is] investigating is such that *specific benefits and losses* cannot be systematized, operationalized, standardized, or predicted" (169, emphasis mine), and while these interactions' socioaffective power stems largely from the fact that they arise unbidden, Delany does insist that "what [he is] proposing is that we utilize consciously the same principles of socioeconomic diversity through which those pleasant, various, and stable neighborhoods that were never planned grew up naturally" (178–179). Like Delany's model of city planning, which straddles the line between accident and intent, designing for the possibility of chance encounters, we might imagine a model of environmental activism that relinquishes its (futural) fixation on targeted ends and instead embraces "calculated drifting"—Delany's term for the practices of his youth that later "became one with cruising."[57]

To cultivate such a shift in the grammars of political action may seem—as does much in my argument—like an untimely project. For amidst the clear urgency of our climatic and political moment, it can appear that what we need is pragmatic focus: to keep our eye on the prize, not to let our attention "drift"; to center our energies, not to see what happens when they disperse or otherwise spread. But as Luciano and Chen, no less than Delany, remind us, such insistence is often predicated on a problematic narrowing not only of political possibility but also of the premises upon which, and communities for which, change is being advocated: "The demand for 'applicable' forms manifests beyond the realm of policymaking, insinuating intellectual and political crisis-reductionism. . . . In the shadow of the current [2019] presidential administration, we are admonished to narrow our fields of inquiry and action in order to produce the unambiguous 'yeses' said to be needed for political advocacy—yeses that often cluster unreflexively around the desire to return to an unmarked, unruffled whiteness."[58] This contemporary reductionism—with its reification of existing structures of privilege—structurally echoes what Sarah Schulman has deemed the "gentrification of the mind" that accompanied the material gentrifying of New York City amidst the ongoing crisis of AIDS; no less than its infrastructural counterpart, the epistemological process

"*homogenizes* complexity, difference, dynamic dialogic action for change and *replaces* it with sameness . . . [and containment]" (14, original emphasis), in the process "*narrow*[ing] considerably" "[h]ow ideas are allowed to be expressed" (16, emphasis mine).

Importantly, in the face of the imperatives to flatten and homogenize difference, and narrow both attention and possibility, Delany responds by multiplying not just the objects but also the shapes of his attention: *TSRTSB* promiscuously wanders, "amplifies,"[59] proliferates, spreads, courting what Alexis Shotwell deems the "'many yeses'" of "a forever unsettled collectivity."[60] In the process, it rejects the laser focus of the pragmatic political project in favor of peripheral vision, courting and heeding and seeking to amplify what is already happening at the "margins" and "edges" of society and thought. The result is a transformation not only in what we do but also, and more consequentially, in *how* we do it, and yields a politics shaped by the possibilities of erotic life, rather than existing in phobic contradistinction to them;[61] ultimately, the erotic practice that relinquishes objects (and the focused, long-term commitments of monogamy[62]) in favor of ambient relations and rhythms spreads into a political practice that relinquishes set aims in favor of proliferating their conditions of possibility.

A similar understanding of Delany's work animates Keguro Macharia's stirring essay "Not this. More that!"—a reading of *TSRTSB* in conversation with Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." There, Macharia suggests that Delany can help us turn our attention "away from 'solutions' and 'alternatives' and . . . 'remedies' and toward proliferation and intensification," predicating our refusal of the present—"not this"—not on its replacement (what Elizabeth Povinelli deems a "propositional otherwise") but on the amplifying of the quotidian practices already here—"more that."[63] Following this suggestion, we might note that the force of Delany's political intervention resides in its attention less to nouns (the what) than to adverbs (the how), less to objects than to the habits of their relation, less to prospective demands than to extant possibilities, less to ends than to ongoing practices; as Macharia continues, the "pleasantness" that Delany traces and celebrates "is not a remedy. It is not even a demand. . . . [It is] an atmosphere created by quotidian interactions and actions."[64]

As this turn toward the quotidian and the atmospheric already suggests, what renders *TSRTSB* a resource for our present is not any uncomplicated celebration of intensification, but rather its attention to—and formal embodiment of—the rhythms of intensifying and diminishing. Macharia writes: "It might be that the pleasant builds into an intensity called the erotic and it might be that the erotic diffuses into a quotidian called pleasantness, and it might be the weaving of the erotic and the pleasant that names a present quotidian that extends into a desired future, a 'more that' we claim and practice."[65] One way to read Delany's work in Macharia's terms (or vice versa) is thus to observe that "more"ness is not always about intensification and proliferation; at times the "more" of queer life is achieved through dissipation and spread, just as the amplified pleasures of sex and community alike are achieved through a relinquishing—a *lessening*—of personal identity.[66]

What makes *TSRTSB* a virtuosic piece of writing, and work of political theorizing, is the way that it modulates the many intensities of its pleasures, like the many magnitudes of its losses,[67] insisting upon their necessary intertwinement. For Delany no more embraces a homogenized "more" than he does any other form of sameness; rather, he predicates the structure and motion of his argument upon the variegation that characterizes cruising and contact alike. Indeed, in the opening paragraph of his 1998 writer's preface, he includes intensity as one of the lines along which the two essays of the volume deliberately diverge: "In different ways, at different focal lengths, along different trajectories and at different intensities, both pieces look at aspects of New York City affected by the Times Square Development Project of the last few years" (xiii). The book that follows—in which an autoethnographic essay abuts a theoretical one, graphic descriptions of sexual encounters abut "respectable" academic prose, the primary argument abuts a bolded sidebar, and image abuts text—mobilizes the varied textures and durations and intensities of urban encounters to resist the forces threatening their disappearance.

And here we might return to the fact that Delany learned his politics not just from an intensely pleasurable queer way of life but also from its persistent fragility. As Julian Lucas reflects in his account of *The Motion of Light in Water*, Delany's 1988 memoir of his young adult life: "Delany recounted his coming of age in a vanishing world where sex with thousands

of men at theatres, bathhouses, piers, and public rest rooms had awakened him to the infinite breadth not only of desire but of social possibility."[68] Such an account reminds us that "vanishing" is not only an ongoing process[69]—in this case, spanning the entirety of Delany's adolescence and adulthood—but also a process of going on. For it this very "vanishing world" that "awakened" Delany "to the infinite breadth" of erotic-social possibility, and that catalyzed the life—including the sex life—that *TSRTSB* details.

Throughout the book, Delany both insists upon and rhetorically embodies this "breadth" that the vanishing world simultaneously awakened and endangered;[70] in the face of homogenizing forces (including not only the Times Square Redevelopment Project but also the reign of gay respectability and homonormativity) that narrow the options for life in the name of social legitimacy, he holds open the receding possibilities of Times Square by inhabiting the erotic and conceptual affordances of besideness.[71] Rather than moving forward into a future too readily aligned with capitalist "development" and the "progress" of liberal inclusion or nostalgically reaching backward toward a receding and imperfect past, he writes a text that moves sideways (across what Luciano and Chen deem the "burgeoning adjacencies of the present"[72]), heeding what becomes possible when avowedly different texts and ideas and genres "sit by one another," "shoulder to shoulder," as did bodies—and commercial and noncommercial sexual activities—in the Times Square theaters and bars that he frequented (146). That the conceptual work takes the shape of the erotic experience does not somehow keep the old Times Square alive—indeed, as has been the case with all of the texts in this project, Delany wants his readers to feel the loss as loss. Rather, it makes legible what and how the erotic knows, while also demonstrating how to resist the winnowing of contact and narrowing of thought that gentrification naturalizes. Such a project, importantly, requires *not* idealizing what has been lost, or nostalgically showing just the good, or insisting solely upon remembering in the face of imposed cultural forgetting. Rather, it invites forgetting and remembering, pleasure and pleasantness, the neighborhood stoop and the porn theater, the liberatory and the regressive, the benefits and the losses, the uncut city sewer worker and the award-winning college professor, the one-off and the lifelong to sit side by side.[73] The doubling of the argument's focal lengths

becomes a widening of its aperture, welcoming into our line of sight (or our peripheral vision) the motion of light from theater marquees gone dark, bathing us, once again, in the "afterglow of the forgotten."[74]

As all of the doubles and "and"s above indicate, and as the work of terminal care also reminds us, besideness is not something that can be enacted alone. Macharia insists upon the social relevance of "pleasantness" by reminding us that pleasantries are, by definition, *exchanged*; similarly, Delany's textual fabric gains its strength from its sociability, from the way in which the transient meeting of episodes and ideas and essays—like the encounter of bodies in the theaters or on the street—yields a durable, if oft-illegible, infrastructure. Importantly, the resulting forms of solidarity—whether between the two halves of the book or the men in Times Square—involve less locking arms than engaging in practices of glancing touch. Like Sedgwick's "art of loosing" or "open mesh of possibilities," and like the "social net" of contact itself, Delany's juxtaposed essays and forms texturally embody the ethics of non-proprietary touch (of holding, and being held, without holding on), the queer rhythm of making contact and letting go.

And what word is there for the formal and lived practice of dwelling side by side if not, again, *collateral*—a term which powerfully articulates the confluence of horizontality, breadth, and chance in Delany's political imaginary? Although "collateral" is most frequently invoked in the lexicon of damage, it can also indicate the enabling accidents of queer life itself; such a repurposing suggests the inextricability, in *TSRTSB*, of "benefits and losses," of collective fragility and collective action. A politics that moves collaterally—in which we, heeding the etymology of the term, move *sideways, together (com + lateralis)*—reckons with the sheer breadth of the present's realities, and heeds the sheer breadth of the present's possibilities. Given that "collateral" also means "something of value given as security," Delany's form—no less than his argument—reminds us that, especially in cases of institutional abandonment and enforced homogenization, our security lies in each other, not despite but (as Lorde so powerfully has taught us) *because* of our differences,[75] not despite but because of all the things about each other we do not (and perhaps cannot) know.

Queer Fallout

The potential for relating collaterally—and for rethinking the tenor of the collateral itself—becomes clearest in a scene that plays with magnitude, transposing the lexicon of environmental catastrophe into the context of quotidian pleasure. Near the close of the book, Delany leaves the theater and turns to the street, his eyes fixed not on the flickering image on a screen before him but on a historically bright light above:

> That evening, around seven-twenty, I got home to comet Hale-Bopp, bright and fuzzy-bearded above the west extremity of Eighty-second Street . . . ; I turned up the street to make a quick trip to the supermarket. On my way back down Eighty-second Street, Hale-Bopp created a veritable wave of contact.
>
> . . .
>
> §10.1. . . . [O]ver the next eight months, I have seen none of the people involved in [these encounters] again. . . . Their only fallout is that they were pleasant—and that pleasantness hangs in the street under the trees and by the brownstone stoops near which they occurred, months after Hale-Bopp has ellipsed the sun and soared again into solar night. That fallout will remain as long as I remain comfortable living here. (182–183)

No matter how many times I read *TSRTSB*, I am always stopped in my tracks by the word that flashes up not once but twice in this passage's final sentences. Accustomed as ecocritics are to works seeking to represent the kind of slow violence that Rob Nixon so magnificently theorizes—the aftermath of a nuclear bomb; the prolonged temporality of global climate change; the persistence and magnification of toxins as they make their way through ecological systems and chains—it is, of course, not the word "fallout" itself that startles me. But within a context not of damage but of gain, dealing not in chemicals but in affect, Delany's use of the term—and the kind of endurance implicitly at stake within it—transforms Nixon's logic. For what he helps us to see is not only slow violence but also slow intimacy,[76] the promise of a mode of relation (human *or* environmental)

that attends to what emerges in the wake of a past event—even, or perhaps especially, if that happening seemed to matter little at all.

And when we turn explicitly to the status of the environment(al), we can't help but notice in the passage above that as Hale-Bopp fades from the night sky, the enduring impact of the contact it inaugurated "hangs in the street under the trees and by the brownstone steps near which they occurred." This affective legacy—dispersed, muted, ambient—inheres in the streets of Manhattan, and, without permanently linking the parties involved, persists within the space that they chanced to share. It's worth pointing out that Delany's primary relationships do not and likely cannot perform the same function. Perhaps our primary relationships cannot be quite so ambient; they are often more personal, more interested, more directed. Indeed, within the structure of this passage itself, the proprietary and the personal are bracketed insofar as they frame the encounters on the street but don't directly influence it, insofar as the "wave of contact" inaugurated by the comet is a distinctly impersonal phenomenon or force. The scene begins at "home" (although, interestingly, Delany arrives home to "bright and fuzzy-bearded" Hale-Bopp, not to his partner). It ends with a litany of possessives and a gesture toward domestic life—"With *my* cane, I walked up *my* stoop steps, carrying *my* groceries and *my* notebook into the vestibule, where I *unlocked* the door and pushed into the lobby" (183, emphasis mine). But between? Between we have people who may or may not "belong" to (or in) the neighborhood, who are not names or stories or identities but rather bodies and postures and garments, relational paradigms and ethnic/racial/socioeconomic types ("a heavy, white-haired plainclothes policeman"; "two women . . . , one in a brown raincoat, both in hats"; a "father and two kids, son and daughter"; "a homeless man in his twenties with blackened hands and short black hair"; "an older Hispanic gentleman in an overcoat, with a pencil-thin mustache" [182–183]). It is these anonymous figures—and the fleeting interactions they (and Delany) share—that leave a trace, or a tail through the night sky.

So what if those of us concerned with, and about, the environment acknowledged what we might be loathe to admit—that the earth can never be our primary relationship? For in virtually all respects, environmentalism's gains are not direct but collateral—that word that we are accustomed to using to describe damage, not improvement. Achieving long-term environmental goals can only ever be collateral to our efforts, can

only ever be an indirect effect of other practices. In other words: we cannot save the earth. We can do *x*, *y*, and *z* and hope that they add up to meaningful change. We can do *x*, *y*, and *z* and hope that others we don't know—the anonymous fellow-denizens of this moment and the even more radically anonymous denizens of moments yet to come—do *p*, *q*, and *r*. Stewardship is not simply about those metonymic gestures addressed earlier but also about impersonal interactions, about avowing the ways in which our planetary fate—whatever we do or however we identify—is yoked to the behavior of strangers (human and nonhuman), to the contingent relationship between intent and outcome, to the even more complicated relationship between unintentional actions and their ultimate end. Endurance is only ever going to come as a result of a confluence of circumstances. Our contribution is only ever going to be provisional, partial, and minor. Our task, once again, may be not to get into the business of saving but rather to ask ourselves a series of questions that are no less important for being a bit more diminutive: How are we to relate to a job that is only ever partially and contingently done? How do we build a political movement responsive to accident, to the collateral, to the unintentional? How do we learn to value the things that happen secondarily—whose outcomes lie beyond the reach of our control, and beyond the reach of our intent? And how might we thus acknowledge the fact that the secondary need not be devalued, but rather differently valued, requiring different paradigms of engagement—and yielding different forms of benefit—than those we associate with our primary relationships? What if, rather than analogizing environmental stewardship to the forms of care that we already know how to practice, we trained ourselves—and each other—in these?

***

Although the term "fallout" itself appears only these two times in *TSRTSB*, its resonances—like those of so many of the local moments that Delany depicts—characteristically spread. For the book's meditations urge us to consider how forms of pleasure and sociability (not just toxins) can yield fallout, and how benefit (not just damage) can unfurl collaterally. A healthy, diverse, safe[77] New York City is the queer fallout of a Times Square where moviehouses and other spaces conducive to pleasure intersperse with a range of small businesses. A livable life is the queer fallout of a net of

casual encounters that, on their own, often seem to yield little immediate consequence. Ongoing ethical engagement with the environment(s) where we live—and the wide-ranging communities that comprise them—is the queer fallout of forms of contact that seem to require less commitment than coincidence. And in the passage about Hale-Bopp, pleasantness is the queer fallout of casual encounter; more broadly, pleasantness—an adjective that Delany defines as "pleasure in its most generalized form" (121) and that suffuses the text—is the queer fallout of desire's free expression.

Indeed, pleasantness also lingers rhetorically in the wake of scenes of cruising and contact more generally, appearing thirty-nine times across the text, with increasing density. The word is foundational to Delany's argument in the second half of the book, which more explicitly theorizes the benefits of the kind of sociability that the moviehouse culture both embodies and facilitates:

> The primary thesis underlying my several arguments here is that, given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will. (111)

In keeping with his investment in social webs and lymphatic systems, in the relationship between sex and stoop and store, between erotic and ecological life, "pleasant" is his word not only for the dispersed feeling after Hale-Bopp or for the experience of supermarket contact but also for several of his sexual encounters in and around Times Square. Throughout the book, his use of the word has the feel of something both systematic and spontaneous, something that—perhaps familiarly enough to any writer—straddles the line between accident and intent. He uses it so often—and in so many different contexts—that it comes to traverse the pages of the book as luminously it does the social fabric of the city, transforming the pages of *TSRTSB* into a textual ecology redolent with pleasantness. Eventually, Delany comments on the semi-intentionality of his rhetorical experiment: "Nevertheless, the results of networking have regularly smoothed, stabilized, and supported my career and made it more pleasant (there is that term again) than it would have been without it" (138). After this moment,

"pleasant" appears even more frequently, often multiple times within a single paragraph, gaining a rhetorical and conceptual density whose impact extends beyond any one appearance of it. In the same way that the feeling of pleasantness in the Hale-Bopp scene (and its aftermath) does not attach to a single being or encounter but rather suffuses the space, the adjective *pleasant* momentarily alights upon a given noun only to free itself to roam again.[78] Perhaps "pleasantness," as Delany uses it, is thus a synonym for the "intransitive pleasure" upon which Bersani's analysis relies—that is, an affect resulting when pleasure detaches from specific incidents and ends.[79] Ultimately, then, the term's emergence, movement, and persistence within the manuscript becomes synecdoche for much of Delany's argument: how seemingly disparate practices or encounters can become a way of life and the precondition for community; how ethics can be predicated on accident; how individual and collective feelings can disperse throughout a world or a text.

And here, formal experiment once again comes to meet ethical claim. For ambient pleasantness is likely not the paradigm that we expect to find woven through *TSRTSB*—not only because of the text's more memorable emphasis on pleasure but also, and more importantly, because of the sociohistorical context in which Delany writes. Writing about an era of queer extinction, with its forms of epidemiological and social harm, from the vantage point of a gentrifying New York in which (his) Times Square, too, has been lost, Delany's emphasis on pleasant surprise is intertwined with an attention to exposure, damage, and risk. Such a confluence may serve to reposition ecological discourse in a less paranoid relationship to risk, for (as queer theory teaches us) when we relinquish a certain insistence upon management and control, we admit our exposure not only to danger and harm but also to hope, possibility, and affinity. As Sedgwick insists in her theorization of reparative reading:

> [T]o read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious, paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. (146)

Indeed, one striking element of *TSRTSB* is how capaciously generous it is: how moving, how tender, how full of faith in people and communities and fleeting contact. Delany's is not a world without harm, clearly; *TSRTSB* is, at its core, an elegy for a community ravaged by intertwined social and epidemiological factors. But—in keeping with the proximity that Sedgwick notes between reparative reading and the depressive position—affirmative (and affirming) paradigms are built in the wake of harm. It is because there can be—and often are—terrible surprises that there can also be good ones; it is because we are exposed to the forms of loss that often seem to constitute not only the queer community but also the experience of environmental care that we can also feel the way in which familiarity and fondness and improvement slowly burgeon.

I do not mean to suggest simply that we dwell in a world where surprises—or luck, or "health"—can be either good or bad. Such a claim would not only be banal, but would also understate the powerful implications of Delany's text. For in responding to a moment in American culture when contact, particularly of the sexual variety, was pathologized, a reader might expect that Delany would simply invert the terms of such critique, and emphasize the ways in which contact itself can be beneficial. However, if *TSRTSB* teaches us anything, it may be that contact itself is neither good nor bad, neither healthy nor pathological; for Delany, contact is an *ethos* regardless of its outcome. What his book insists, we might say, is not that contact is good (although sometimes its consequences are) but rather that contact itself *is*; his account urges us be receptive to the ways in which contact shapes the dimensions of our everyday life even (or especially) when it does not resolve itself into a legible end.[80] In both queer and ecological contexts, we have become so accustomed to articulating the (often detrimental) outcome of contact—the epidemic disease ravaging a population of gay men, the songbird population falling victim to the effects of DDT—that we rarely attend to contact itself as an ongoing mode. Whereas those behind the "improvement" of Times Square argue that we must limit contact so as to limit harm, Delany refuses to collapse the former into the latter, insisting instead that contact is a kind of ecological web, and that contact is inherently promiscuous. If the verbs through and in which contact is felt—loitering and lingering and waiting and sitting—are intransitive, then, counterintuitively, so may be contact itself. No longer reducible to the touching of two objects (or of a subject and an object), the

contact foundational to Delany's own sexual ecology, it turns out, is less an act than a mode of occurrence, less a pathological condition than a condition of possibility.

And here we might glimpse one final way of understanding the complex relationship between cruising and contact. For if contact is the medial dimension of socioecological life, then cruising is the practice (or, to again invoke Muñoz, the habit of attention) that makes it legible, and through which we can, in turn, learn to navigate it, with the help of Delany's essay/periplum. While the forcefield of contact may be no easier to chart than are the contours of the "waiting place," that region between this world and the next for which Jewett's Captain Littlepage futilely scans the map on the schoolhouse wall, *TSRTSB* nevertheless becomes a geography, one where contact emanates in the transit between the text's two essays, amidst the reverberations between the main text and the sidebar, across the episodic encounters that disperse into pleasantness before resolving back into pleasure. Reading itself comes to seem a kind of cruising, a simultaneously routinized and unpremeditated practice that enables us to sense (and thus to engage) the connective tissue between the moviehouse and the grocery store, the remaining and the forgetting, the casual encounter and the long-term effect, the fleeting flash of Hale-Bopp and the ambient pleasantness that tails behind, Jewett's spinsterly participant-observer writing and Delany's erotic autoethnographic mode. Indeed, as the twilit glow of Dunnet Landing reappears, however unexpectedly, in the marquee lights of Times Square, as the intransitive verbs of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and the "middle ranges of agency" of Sedgwick's terminal writings persist into the lingering, loitering, and waiting at the heart of *TSRTSB*, and as the movement between pleasure and pleasantness proves to extend not only across a lifetime but also across widely disparate scenes in gay male and queer women's writing, we might find a glancing touch between literary traditions that matters precisely to the extent that it remains uncodified and unnamed.

As this final turn begins to suggest, when we let intransitive contact condition our own readerly possibilities, the resonances of Delany's argument prove to extend well beyond the streets and structures that he discusses. For an environmental ethic more thoroughly engaged with urban space, with impersonality, with sociability and pleasure, with material entanglements and dis-anthropocentric possibilities, could be the queer

fallout of attending seriously to *TSRTSB* and the temporary encounters that it foregrounds. And a mode of ecological reading that listens for unexpected echoes, heeds the claims made by literary form, and trusts in seemingly incongruous juxtaposition (in the process of sitting *beside*), could be the queer fallout of charting our course via Delany's periplum. Indeed, if we expand the scale of our gaze, loosen our proprietary attachments to the texts that we think of as being germane to our field(s), and open ourselves more fully to contingency and surprise, we might realize (perhaps with a start!) that those of us invested in environmental activism, thought, and literature have in fact been cruising the planet all along.

5

Persistent Decay

Queer Half-Lives and the Poetics of Fallout

In the final scene of Holly Morris and Anne Bogart's 2015 documentary *The Babushkas of Chernobyl*, an elderly woman fishes alone in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, accompanied only by the lingering traces of her pasts—by the nuclear meltdown in 1986 whose radioactive fallout has made her beloved home among the most toxic places on earth, by the Holodomor genocide-by-famine that killed many of her family members when she was an infant, leaving her more afraid of starvation and displacement than of the radioactive chemicals that surround and suffuse her, by the melody of springtime that her mother taught her long ago.[1] Officially, the region in which she stands has been deemed unfit for human life, its alarmed gates and barbed wire fences designating a perimeter of rigid governmental and military control; all surviving residents of the region were forcibly relocated in the wake of the nuclear disaster, and what has been excluded indefinitely is nothing less than the very possibility of human existence. Unofficially, however, it is home not only to abundant plant and animal life, but also to a loose sisterhood of 197 elderly women whose homes lie scattered across the 1000 square miles of the exclusion zone. The Babushkas have been permitted to return to their homes precisely because of their perceived futurelessness; their infertility means that they are in no danger of bearing children who would inherit the acute toxicity of their motherland, while their advanced age means that they are likely to die of natural causes before the effects of radiation can accumulate enough to cause them mortal harm. They are allowed to return, in other words, because their own half-lives are short, because their bodies will not last to reap the disaster that Chernobyl has sown. These futureless women—who garden and fish and distill moonshine in the shadow of the Chernobyl sarcophagus, who point out the beauty of the "involuntary park" that the

abandoned region has become, who endure visits by government officials assigned to measure with relentlessly beeping Geiger counters the otherwise imperceptible risks of their existence, who tend the graves of loved ones returned to the zone as corpses for burial, who have fallen out of normative human life but together constitute a queerly "nuclear" family—are both uncannily persistent figures from a pre-Chernobyl Ukraine and examples of an unplanned social ecology emerging from (and amidst) one of the worst environmental disasters of the twentieth century. Together, they constitute one present of Chernobyl, an event that we date to four decades ago but that can hardly be said to have ended at all.

In a chapter that will consider the ways in which socioecological phenomena persist precisely in and as their apparent dissipation, I have opened with *The Babushkas of Chernobyl* in part so as to let it recede; however, I also begin here because the film foregrounds the temporal and relational concept that will preoccupy me in the pages that follow: fallout. The complicated temporality of the spinsterly Babushka's pastoral scene gestures toward a seemingly straightforward observation, one that animates a great deal of work in the humanities today: that contemporary life is populated, in one way or another, by the specters of other times and places. Indeed, to be alive in the here and now often brings with it the disarming sensation that we are also living in the there and then, whether this means experiencing the extent to which our collective present is constituted by the lingering repercussions of past events, or by fearing consequences that already have been set in motion but have yet to emerge as such. Whether we experience these disorientations in the form of uncanny hauntings, as threats or desires lurking just beyond the thresholds of our perception, or as a state of interminable mourning,[2] our critical discourses seek a lexicon (and a set of epistemic habits) for reckoning with the extent to which the present is nonsynchronous with itself, holding the past much as the exclusion zone does Chernobyl's disaster.

The prevailing conceptual strategy, seemingly across disciplines, has been to theorize this peculiar lasting as a matter of aftermath. To be alive in the twenty-first century is to live, in Anna Tsing's phrase, "in the ruins of capitalism," in Saidiya Hartman's, in—or *as*—"the afterlife of slavery," or, in Rob Nixon's, in "ecologies of the aftermath." [3] Due to the fact that even relatively new critical fields have acquired a past, and due to the fact that

we are by now often decades removed from the epicenters of these fields' inaugurating crises—we find ourselves wondering, for example, whether we are, today, *after* queer theory.[4] And, not unrelatedly, as readers and writers and literary critics, we ask how best to represent these strange dislocations: these experiences of coming after, of being belated, of encountering in the present the persistent traces of other places and times. Those of us who specialize in narrative find ourselves coming up short, our faith in language and literature—or at least the language and literature and forms of the past—reaching a kind of representational limit point.

However, as I'll suggest, representation—with its dual demand of resemblance and rupture (insofar as a representation should look like, without being, its referent)—may in fact impede our ability to attend to the forms of non-mimetic continuity and illegible persistence that both constitute and trouble our current socioecological climate. As an alternative, in this chapter I offer a poetics of fallout—an epistemic and rhetorical model for thinking the dissipation, invisible lasting, and indirect causality that my titular term connotes. Thus I offer fallout not simply as a synonym for aftermath but rather as a figure that by definition indicates how temporality inheres in phenomena by rendering them continuous with but nonidentical to themselves. I thus suggest that fallout can both allow us to think through the strange dislocations of our present, and address many critics' own lingering questions regarding the role that literature—and, specifically, literary representation—can play under such socioecological circumstances. By turning my attention to an archive of queer texts that instantiate fallout both grammatically and structurally, and whose related play on concepts of the "nuclear" (including, importantly, the nuclear family) challenges our faith in a continuity predicated on resemblance, I will suggest how the *form* of queer literature inspires a mode of attention for precisely those imperceptible persistences that bring representation up short. In so doing, I offer one final argument for the importance of reading outmoded or residual texts, this time because they model how that which has fallen out of vogue persists unaccountably but unmistakably in and as our present. As I trace queer paradigms of fallout as they reverberate across aesthetic, political, historical, and methodological realms, and demonstrate how the concept links not only queer theory and ecocriticism but also the two bodies of queer literature at the heart of this project, I offer queer fallout as a model for ecocritical reading.

In constructing this chapter explicitly around the complex question of persistence, I seek to demonstrate how the previous chapters' excavation of forms of lasting that emerge amidst futureless circumstances alters the grammars in which we understand how the past uncannily persists.[5] As I will show, the habits of queer attention that have emerged via the literary and theoretical texts at the heart of this project—predicated as they are on heeding paradigms of indirect causality, tracing forms of queer untimeliness, lingering with bodies and relationships and literary traditions as they diminish and subtly change—collectively yield a practice of thought adequate to the epistemological demands of a queerly dislocated present. Indeed, insofar as the book has been predicated on following genres to their far edges, this chapter explicitly considers how such a method can help us to trace socioecological phenomena as they disperse toward their own edges, or to stay with "acute" events as they persist in the form of dissipated effects. And it does so by returning to many of the texts foundational to those previous chapters, insisting in the process upon the possibility of the nominally concluded past to itself become new. Less the afterlife of what came before than its half-life, this chapter traces the earlier arguments as they spread to sites distant from where they originated, and wield unexpected effects in turn. In keeping with the Sedgwickian art of loosing, I conclude the project not by tying threads together but instead by considering what becomes possible when we let the other chapters fall out of their own earlier gravitational centers and persist in unfamiliar form.[6] In so doing, I also transpose the project's interest in belatedness into a readerly methodology, considering what becomes legible—this time about the implications of the book itself—only "at the last."

Centripetal Imaginaries and Queer Bonds

That the past's uncanny persistence requires specific habits of attention and invites particular literary responses is the premise of one of the most influential books in ecocriticism: Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, which has done as much as any other work in the field to shape how I understand the complex temporality of harm. There, Nixon theorizes the processes through which past crises have become the chronic condition of our present: His titular slow violence, unlike spectacularized catastrophes, "occurs gradually and out of sight," "is

dispersed across time and space," is "attritional"; "incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions [play] out across a wide range of temporal scales" and emerge only via "ecologies of the aftermath."[7] Such "long dyings" (2) are exemplified for Nixon by phenomena ranging from the diffuse epidemiological and ecological consequences of the depleted uranium munitions wielded in the Gulf War to the "interminable trials" (51) undergone by the citizens of Khaufpur, Indra Sinha's fictionalization of Bhopal in his novel *Animal's People*.

For Nixon, clearly, the political problem at hand is always also an epistemological problem, and vice versa—or, to put this another way, the challenge for action is always also a challenge for reading. In order to resist the paradigms of illegibility and forgetting and plausible deniability that his project so magisterially diagnoses, he offers formulas for redress that are strategically asymmetrical to the problems at hand; in other words, his literary critical and activist projects seek to undo the kinds of dissimulation that have obscured responsibility and posed difficulties for taking political action. For Nixon, precisely to the extent that slow violence names harm that has fallen out of sight, the role of critic and activist alike is to draw it back in, to bring dispersed and dissimulated forms of harm to the center of our attention. Likewise, to the extent that slow violence is rendered elusive by the many geographic and temporal distances intervening between cause and effect, the role of the critic and activist is to *re-present*, to draw various times together into an actionable "now."

In the opening salvo of his book, for instance, Nixon writes: "In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?" (3) Here, the *re-* of representation—that is, the mechanism that returns violence to presence—cuts against the "slow moving," "anonymous" disasters that become plausibly deniable precisely insofar as they lose their immediacy and identifiability. Their alias—or rather, their anonymity—is a function of the temporality of their harm, which, as it unfurls and deepens, often resembles less and less its initial origin or cause. Slow violence is thus damage unfolding in a manner we might describe as *continuity without*

resemblance. It is clear, on these grounds, why representation seems both urgent and oppositional, rendering slow violence newly punctual and newly recognizable.

Nixon's own argumentative practices reflect such aims. The strategy of a return to center—what I'll be calling a centripetal logic—is evident throughout the book, including at the juncture when Nixon most explicitly discusses his suspicion toward what he deems "historically indifferent formalism":

> When literary studies become *uncoupled* from worldly concerns, we frequently witness, alongside an excessive regard for ahistoric philosophy, an accompanying *historically indifferent* formalism that treats the study of aesthetics as the literary scholar's definitive calling. . . . These concerns have a *direct* bearing on the relationship between literary forms, forms of socioenvironmental change, and environmental activism. Crucially, how do we as environmental scholars keep questions of political agency and historical change *central* in order to *connect* specialized knowledge to broader public worlds in which environmental policy takes shape and within which resistance movements arise? In this book, I have underscored those places where writers, *by drawing on literature's testimonial and imaginative capacities*, have engaged nonliterary forces for social change. *Rather than displacing* social agency onto anthropomorphized, idealized forms, I argue that any interest in form must be *bound* to questions of affiliation, including affiliation between writers and movements for environmental justice. (31, emphases mine)

Here, he engages in projects of *yoking*—evident in his language of coupling, connecting, and binding—that bring dispersed effects into a singular environmental and activist imaginary. For Nixon, both converting crisis into image and yoking literary questions to political ones constitute a powerful antidote to formalist methods that are "uncoupled from worldly concerns" and that, as such, "displac[e] social agency" and risk impeding "literature's testimonial and imaginative capacities."

Slow Violence, of course, is hardly unique in privileging interpretive paradigms that focus attention back to a single, central image or term. Such

centripetal strategies are pivotal to environmental writing, from Rachel Carson's famous "A Fable for Tomorrow" in *Silent Spring* (which is a parable about a community's failure to see slow violence as much as it is a correction of that failure itself) to the popularization of the word "Anthropocene," which, in Jedediah Purdy's account, "is a 'portmanteau term' [that], like the earlier portmanteau term 'environment,' serves to join disparate problems into a single, coherent crisis." Such terms, Purdy reflects, are "pragmatic: [they try] to help people to act by gathering the elements of their predicament together in a tractable way."[8] Indeed, environmental thought is often predicated on the urgency of drawing back into view that which too readily falls out of it, that which dissipates in visibility while persisting—and even growing—in danger.

As powerful as such approaches are, and as influential as they have been for ecocritical hermeneutics, they also may inadvertently reify the very tendencies that produce the problematic illegibility in the first place. For not only does an insistently centripetal imaginary further obscure the dissipation, diminution, and drift that so often characterize the dislocated lasting of past harm, but the combination of rupture and resemblance at stake in representation makes it ever more difficult to notice the queer forms of continuity that in fact characterize the relationship between disparate historical moments or events, or between slow violence's causes and effects. In other words, while a centripetal imaginary brings specific problems into view, it does little to refine the habits of attention that enable such problems so readily to be lost to sight.

In response to this quandary, I want to make an alternate offering, one that begins by gently shifting the terms of the problem but aims ultimately to alter how we understand literature's role in responding to the socioecological problem of persistence. In place of—or alongside—the self-resembling linearity of aftermath I propose thinking in terms of the oft imperceptible and decentered spread of fallout, a move which also requires deviating from the prevalent concept of afterlife in favor of the more temporally and ontologically complex (and less vitalist) term half-life.[9] Unlike a representational logic, the conceptual and formal paradigm that fallout implies is not one that re-presents but, rather, one that attunes us, precisely, to the absence of absence—to the fact that the radioactive chemicals have not in fact disappeared, only dispersed or decayed, to the

fact that consequences that seem not yet to have arrived are in fact here long before they register as such. Fallout, in my account, does not lead us immediately back to legibility, but rather models a mode of thought in which dispersion and dissipation and diminution are limned as such, precisely in their oft-illegible persistence.

That such an endeavor is a queer formalist one becomes clear not only when we consider the grammars of queer untimeliness and lasting that this project has limned but also when we look closely at Nixon's own language in his critique of formalism above. For the privileging of stable "bonds" that lead to "coupling" (and the related presumption that to be "coupled" is to be meaningfully "bound") may give a queer reader—or any reader who has been engaged with the spinsterly and promiscuous imaginaries of the previous chapters—pause. The centripetal logics of thought on display privilege a specific form of legibility, one that understands the work of centering—versus lingering in the margins, or on the down-low, or at the blurry edges—as the prerequisite for political traction. But centering may prove no more necessary to political attention than coupling is to ethical relation; indeed, as we already have seen, queer reading—an interpretive practice shaped by, and responsive to, all the ways there are to uncouple—involves a habit of attention predicated on "*dis*articulat[ing]" and "*dis*engag[ing]" notions from one another, on heeding the "*open mesh* of possibilities" and "inhabit[ing] the very farthest of the *loose ends* where representation, identity, gender, sexuality, and the body can't be made to line up neatly together," on developing an affirmative "art of *loosing*."[10] And just as that latter practice emerged from Sedgwick's experience of living with terminal illness, alternatives to Nixon's logics recur across accounts of queer life at the last; speaking of the endangered erotics of Sarah Orne Jewett, Peter Coviello reflects: "Who knows what objects a person's ardor, once *unbound*, might transform?"[11] Likewise, James Merrill, meditating on the complex sensuality of living and dying with AIDS, traces the shape of "this terminal gooseflesh" "painstakingly *unbound*."[12] Whereas Nixon's project engages the dissipated shape of slow violence by countering it with centripetal gestures of binding and cohering, we might instead respond with a queer praxis of reading and writing that formalizes centrifugal movement, dissipation, and in-coherence themselves, heeding the complex rhythms of coming together and falling apart at stake in what Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young describe as "queer bonds."[13]

Inspired by such a possibility, in the remainder of the chapter I offer a queer formalist approach to the dissipated and non-mimetic lasting of the past, one that replaces Nixon's emphasis on representation by heeding his (much more fleeting) invitation to "give figurative shape to" such paradigms (10). However, while he argues that "[t]o confront slow violence requires . . . that we *plot* and give figurative shape to *formless threats* whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time" (10, emphasis mine), I instead return to *plotless* texts of literary regionalism and AIDS literature, demonstrating how they trace the *form*—or the shapeshifting *forms*[14]—that dissipation and diminishment in fact already involve.[15] As such a gesture begins to suggest, I want to argue that the very paradigms of centrifugal relation and temporal dislocation that, for Nixon, confound habits of attention and demand novel structures of representation long have been the *basis* of queer reading, queer life, and queer ethics alike. Ultimately, I offer fallout as an alternate model for understanding the temporality of both ecological catastrophe and queer ongoingness, one that helps us to navigate our present tense intimacy with the forces (genres, historical events, forms of damage, forms of possibility) that we are nominally "after."

Queer Fallout; or, Centrifugal Sociabilities

Defined as the radioactive refuse of a nuclear explosion, or—importantly—as "the adverse side effects of a situation," fallout entered the lexicon in its current meaning in 1950. But etymologically, it comes from the verbal phrase "to fall out," whose relational meaning—"to disagree, quarrel"—has been with us since 1546, around the same time (1569) that its other primary meaning—"to happen, chance, occur, arise, come to pass"—emerged.[16] These guises—involving relationality and chance in equal measure—inform the word's current usage in the lexicon of environmental damage. For fallout involves the unpredictable spread of radioactive material and, via its measurement in half-lives, is the matter of a probable, not strict, calculus. The half-life of a radioactive isotope indicates the time on average required for half of the radioactive entities to decay into what is called, in an atomic variant on non-reproductive futurity, stable daughter nuclei. But as a measure of isotopic tendency, half-lives are avowedly fallible estimates whose calculation involves the contradictory work of counting up (in

exposure and effects) while counting down (in the percentage of the original substance)—that is, of measuring persistence in terms, precisely, of dissipation and decay. Fallout thus names ways of meeting what we missed; it confirms a rather queer capacity to be affected by events not only geographically remote but also temporally removed. This is the aspect of fallout that led Ulrich Beck to write, in his 1992 book *Risk Society*, that "the injured of Chernobyl are, today, years after the catastrophe, not even born yet."[17] And such temporal and spatial spread transforms the distant or exceptional event into the condition of everyday life. As Mary Mycio writes in *Wormwood Forest*, her natural history of Chernobyl, "exposure now is chronic, not acute."[18] Indeed, fallout reminds us that the dimensions of ostensibly past events are changed by the present they affect, in part because fallout penetrates not just our environments but also our very bodies and their duration; to cite Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring*, "Strontium 90, released through nuclear explosions into the air, . . . drifts down as fallout, lodges in soil, enters into the grass or corn or wheat grown there, and in time takes up its abode in the bones of a human being, there to remain until its death."[19] Fallout is a name for toxicity become climate, for damage become birthright. Fallout indexes how distance from center, far from a simple falling off from presence or immediacy, is itself a mode of consequential relation. And, inasmuch as both the initial episode of fission and the half-life's temporality of decay involve nuclear transmutation, "the conversion of one chemical element or an isotope into another," fallout is a technical term for continuity without resemblance.

But now may be the moment to pause over the fact that, for all of my exposure to the term "fallout" in environmental literature, I came to recognize the term's conceptual reach thanks to ecocriticism's own continuous but non-resembling counterpart: queer theory.[20] That I gleaned the concept from queer thinkers is perhaps less surprising than it sounds, if only because they tend to challenge nothing more vigorously than the purported stability and social centrality of "the nuclear," this time in the sense of normative familial bonds. (Playfully speaking, queer theory may itself be the study of nuclear fission. Less playfully speaking, it is also queer theory that has taught me to limn the contours of human lives too often lived as social half-lives.[21]) Indeed, paradigms of fallout, broadly and imaginatively conceived, ramify across queer writing and thought: in the

attention to forms of intimacy—and forms of possibility—predicated on the rhythms of falling out (or apart); in the centrifugal hermeneutic tendencies of a field originally predicated on destabilizing gestures; in the eccentric (*ek-kentron*, out of center) movement of regionalist literatures not propelled by the gravitational pull of marriage and the family; and in the historical coincidence of nuclear and epidemiological disaster in the 1980s, which in turn shaped the way that seropositive writers made sense of their own experience.

While Weiner and Young open their work on queer bonds by describing the "history of queer theory in terms of an interplay between a centrifugal drive away from sociality and a centripetal pressure toward sociable belonging and linkage" (223), the texts at the heart of the present project have demonstrated the extent to which both queer sociability and queer epistemology—habits of queer relating and habits of queer knowing—are themselves so often affirmatively centrifugal, predicated as much on falling out, and apart, as on coming together. We might begin to heed the implications of this fact by returning to fallout's origin as a relational term. Although its dictionary definition inclines toward legible, even spectacular, rupture (falling out meaning to disagree or quarrel in a way that fractures a relationship), the term's many usages in fact exquisitely index the range of ways—and intensities at which—there are for intimacies to end, diminish, shapeshift. Consider, for instance, "falling out of love": a process that is insistently un-dramatic, non-punctual, and non-acute. Indeed, that kind of falling out is more a matter of illegible diminishment, and of illegible persistence (or of love persisting in the form of its own diminishing) in a way that maps onto the complex and oft-illegible shape of "fallout" in the register of radioactivity. Likewise, the movement from verb to noun—from relational *falling out* to relational *fallout*—also maps the trajectory from event to aftermath. In both cases, fallout becomes a term able to move back and forth between what Nixon calls "spectacular and unspectacular time" (7), and thus perhaps able also to chart a heuristic and formal course between them.

And, unsurprisingly, given that queer life is—as we have already seen many times—a realm where permanent or stable intimacies are not automatically privileged over fleeting ones, queer fallout often grounds relational and erotic possibility rather than simply threatening it. In their recent project "falling out together," Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer

Hamilton meditate on their titular phrase, considering how the shared work of falling out can instigate a queer-feminist "ethics of relation" predicated on a "process of breaking and making and breaking and making."[22] (We might note here the difference between this approach and one that privileges stable "bonds" and "coupling.") Their "ethics of falling out," importantly, moves back and forth grammatically between the nominal and verbal forms of the term: "What is the relation," they ask "between 'fallout' (the aftermath, the wake, what lingers) and 'falling out' (coming apart, rifting, cleaving apart)?" Ultimately, they consider whether "'fall out'—the residue, what's left of the breakdown—[is] where the possibility for something else lies," and may be "how, or where, one begins to 'make a relation' again" (122). As the phrase "falling out together" itself reveals, centrifugal movement can itself be the shape of the "queer bond" that we share. And as the essay "falling out together" itself suggests, fallout is one name for the shape and texture and rhythm of queer ongoingness, for the work of finding the possibilities in what remains amidst friction and fracture and loss, of continuing to watch at and after the end.

A homologous set of possibilities, and rhythms, animates *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*. In the book's preface, Joshua Chambers-Letson reads Siouxsie Sioux's 1986 song "Party's Fall" as "tell[ing] the story of the breakdown and falling apart [of a party] as a condition of possibility. In the song, the collapse of each party becomes the condition for the emergence of something new the next night. . . . Siouxsie points us toward a future in which the very thing that has fallen apart (the party) reconstitutes itself."[23] Both that latter phrase—"fallen apart"—and the lyrics of the song itself ("Your parties fall around you/Another night beckons to you")—indicate that the party's "fall" is less vertical than horizontal, less an irrevocable "downfall" than a project of breaking apart to be made again. Indeed, here the breaking of relation that animates Neimanis and Hamilton's project is transposed onto both the party and the community itself; writing in, and about, the wake of (his mentor and friend) José Esteban Muñoz's untimely death, Chambers-Letson glosses the party as involving an "endlessly renewable chain of events performed into being by a plurality of broken people who are trying to keep each other alive" (xiv).[24]

Although the two examples I have just offered focus on centrifugal intimacies in contemporary social and intellectual life, such falling apart—with its doubled work of breaking and making (possible)—in fact recurs across the literature and theory at the heart of this project, yielding a genealogy of queer thought written in the dispersed lexicon of fallout, centrifugality, and disintegration. Indeed, such movement away from center animates queer writing throughout the periods of interest in this study, coming to constitute (depending on one's perspective) proof of such literature's failure and vitiation or a source of its creative and ethical power. In his 1959 article "The Art of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*," for instance, Warner Berthoff contrasts the spinsterly characters of American regionalism to their British counterparts, lamenting that "[p]erformances and lives which in England, under similar provocation, have traditionally turned *eccentric* yet still can make themselves felt along the central axis, have tended rather in our *centerless* country to *fly off the handle* altogether."[25] Likewise, Guy Reynolds characterizes Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* as involving a "formal *disintegration*" borne of "whirling, *centrifugal* historical forces."[26] Critiquing Cather's praise of Jewett, Berthoff observes that the other two works of American literature for which Cather predicted a "long, long life"—*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter*—have, unlike *Pointed Firs*, "a formal *coherence*."[27]

However, in the estimation of more recent queer readers, such paradigms of "in-coherence" and "ec-centricity" become sources of possibility in the face of disciplinary mechanisms that work via coordinating and consolidating gestures. In *Tomorrow's Parties*, the "special kind of freedom" that Coviello deems possible in the "twilit moment *before* the arrival or calcifying of the terms of sexual identity" involves logics of unbinding and decentering. In asking what sex entails "if it is somehow removed from the idea of sexuality as . . . a thing that somehow sweepingly *binds together* all these scattered attributes and *fuses* them into a definitive sense of who we are" (24, emphases mine), he attends to "errancies" (18), "loose ends" (17), and "strayaway[s]" (91), considering—here, in the specific context of Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*—"how the ordinary things of the world might find themselves reconfigured by the force of a love *unloosed*" (88, emphasis mine). Likewise, Scott Herring's own account of queer relationships that sidestep taxonomized sexuality involves centrifugal motion; in his reading of the homosocial friendship at

the heart of *The Professor's House*, he argues that Cather's protagonist "*pitches himself outside* the historical quickening of modern US national sexuality" while also "*throw[ing] himself outside* his domesticated self"; ultimately the "cross-class, cross-generational contact between an American youth and his elder" "*propels both the boy and the older man outside* [the] parameters [of the middle-class family]."[28]

And such gestures of disaggregating, disintegrating, and destabilizing are quintessential queer hermeneutic moves; indeed, queer theory emerged as a field by mobilizing habits of attention and practices of reading that spin out from center—becoming affirmatively centrifugal and incoherent rather than trying to consolidate, reify, or stabilize. In her 1996 book *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose writes that "[b]roadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire."[29] Which is to say: queer theory has always been a field with an unstable nucleus, insofar as early anti-normative work in the field was predicated on the fact of *instability* (or the gesture of *destabilizing*) itself. We see this in influential queer thinkers' resistance to codified definition and reified identity, for instance in David Halperin's insistence that "[a]s the very word implies, 'queer' does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its *oppositional* relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*."[30] We see this in "queer"'s status as a grammatical chameleon, whose verbal, adverbial, and adjectival dimensions constantly work against the sedimenting tendencies of its nominalized form.[31] And we see this throughout Sedgwick's many descriptions of the practices involved in queer reading. "[A] lot of the most exciting recent work around 'queer,'" she reflected in 1993's "Queer and Now," "spins the term outward along dimensions that cannot be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and *other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example . . ."[32] As "queer" spun outward, so too did her habits of attention

(or, perhaps vice versa, insofar as her habits of attention were foundational in the field). In reflecting on the intellectual consequences of her diagnosis with breast cancer, Sedgwick wrote that "exploring these connections *has* (at least for me it has) to mean hurling my energies outward to inhabit the very farthest of loose ends where representation, identity, gender, sexuality, and the body can't be made to line up together" (13).

If this account of queer theoretical fallout as yet feels a bit abstract or inductive—the somewhat fanciful product of an associative process (linking nuclear families, centers of gravity, destabilizing modes of reading, bonds forming and breaking apart, centrifugal movements and disintegrating gestures, relational practices of falling out [and in])—then it is worth recalling that both queer theory and the body of work now known as AIDS literature emerged at a moment when the world was preoccupied by a nuclear disaster: the effects of the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in April of 1986. In the same years that the fallout of AIDS spread throughout the queer community, the fallout of Chernobyl spread throughout (and beyond) Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. This resonance was hardly lost on queer authors writing in the latter half of the 1980s; indeed, throughout their work, Chernobyl in particular—and nuclear devastation in general—became a way of thinking through both the sheer scale of the epidemic's sweep, and the institutional and governmental indifference toward a disease thought not to affect the "general population" of the United States.

In *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (1988), his wrenching account of his final months with his lover Roger Horwitz, Paul Monette engages the lexicon of radioactivity (references to Marie and Pierre Curie; to Geiger counters; to "nuclear war," etc.) in order to make sense of a number of dimensions of their experience with AIDS: the ongoingness of the disaster; the depths of governmental neglect and cultural denial; the experience of being excluded from "life" itself; the experience of being a figuratively "radioactive" population; the experience of being literally irradiated as part of the treatment for Kaposi Sarcoma. Near the beginning of the memoir, reflecting on how his community initially responded to the novel dangers of the virus, he asks, provocatively: "How much denial was everyone practicing? Enough to power Chernobyl."[33] And Monette was hardly alone in understanding nuclear disaster and radioactive fallout as a resource for thinking—and inhabiting—the threat posed by HIV/AIDS. There is an

underacknowledged body of AIDS poetry that engages in similar work, from Monette's own 1988 poem "The Very Same," which plays on the image of a Geiger counter, to Henri Cole's 1988 poem "A Half-Life," whose title serves to indicate not only a friend's proximity to death but also the queer community's status as not fully socially alive,[34] to Merrill's 1986 haibun "Geiger Counter" (part of the broader work *Japan: Prose of Departure*), which intertwines references to HIV treatment with figures of radioactivity, culminating with the image of a "'Hiroshima' of trivial symptoms and empty forebodings." At a moment when the stirrings of the codified field of queer theory were beginning to emerge, seropositive writers were making sense of their social predicament in terms of radioactive decay.[35]

The affective intensity resulting from this alignment is perhaps nowhere clearer than in Monette's own poem "Half Life," whose invocation of species extinction I discussed briefly in Chapter 3. Like all *18 Elegies for Rog* in *Love Alone*, the poem unfurls in an unrevised wail, with neither syntax nor punctuation present to give cadence, or pause, to the pain. Its cascading images serve to link the original relational meanings of the titular phrase ("The condition of being only partly or not fully alive; a reduced, limited, or unsatisfactory way of life; a life of half the full or normal length"[36]) not only to each other—Rog's death at age forty-four leaving Monette with a life that feels to him hardly worthy of the term—but also to the sense of large-scale, ongoing catastrophe that its meaning in the register of radioactivity would evoke for readers in 1988. Indeed, "Half Life" renders the experience of losing "exactly half the phenomenal world" in visceral imagery of corporeal disfigurement ("half of me doesn't work"; the "broken wing" dragging; the "good eye" searching) and environmental disaster (half a red rose rotting black; the west face of an aching mountain strip-mined and singed as if by lava; rivers dying mid-cataract; "the species from N to Z . . . extinct"; a domestic scene riven by unknown force [lawn chairs "melted," toys "dead," windows "half smithereens"]).[37] That the latter imagery could be drawn directly from footage of Pripyat, the town founded to support the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and officially abandoned in the wake of its explosion, seems hardly a coincidence.

Importantly, the experience of *halving* is made manifest not only in the imagery but also the structure of the poem. Halfway through the sixty-five

lines, the voice itself splits in a stutter—"I want the rest of me to be the rest of you/but cut in half like this how can I I read/your '80 diary . . ." These lines, which straddle a page break, are the closest thing to a pause there is in the poem—the stuttering agony of a self uncoupled, of a half riven from the whole it once helped to comprise. But there is also here a nod to the queer arithmetic involved in half-life (that phenomenon that I earlier described as counting up by counting down). For to be a self halved is, we see, also to be a self doubled, just as to live in a diminished world without Rog is to live in a "world . . . cleaved in two." And such arithmetic also comes to reveal the feeling of futurelessness endemic to both nuclear disaster and AIDS, indexing all the living that his daily life (no less than the Chernobyl zone) now excludes; if the "I" fleetingly becomes, or at least fleetingly instantiates, the "I I" (I + I = II), the poem quickly reminds us of the tragedy that "Plato's myth/of lovers the fated meeting of equal halves/is a tale for lonely kids *there's no act III*" (emphasis mine).

As the implicit homology between the experience of the "lonely kid"—which evokes the poem's earlier reference to Monette being again, or *still*, "the friendless/kid who never made it out of Andover MA"—and the experience of the grief-stricken adult begins to suggest, to get from the half-life of his present to the half-life of his past requires passing through a Rog-shaped (w)hole.[38] And whereas in midlife (half-life?), Monette briefly "had it all," his life with Rog, cut short by the ravages of the epidemic, itself—to cite the subtitle of the memoir he later wrote about that boyhood in Andover—proved to be only "half a life story." The experience of half-life—like the experience of futurelessness more generally—ultimately proves both local and total, both acute and ongoing, both a source of rupture and a source of continuity. Monette's life—from his lonely youth, to the experience of institutional abandonment under AIDS, to the agony of losing Rog—embodies the many phases involved in the queer social "condition of being only partly or not fully alive."

It is perhaps fitting, then, that the poem ends with a haunting image of a body sundered not simply in two directions but rather in four, the "half life" diminishing as half-lives do, the *never*-ending halving leading to an ever more whole *severing*, the body (or the "I," or the "whole") losing its own center and falling out into parts the poem leaves for us to imagine:

the sundering with its howl that never ends
waits till the pictures are shot to sever east
and west like a man bound spreadeagle to four
horses bolting for the corners of an earth
half ash half mad nothing what it was mine
the skull in the field and once I had it all

* * *

Although these haunting final lines may make it difficult to imagine, AIDS literature invokes the specter of radioactivity to index not only breaking and harm, but also the unpredicted forms of (re)making and possibility that emerge amidst—and through—damage; the variegated invocation of nuclear disaster thus also indexes the work of being (again in Chambers-Letson's terms) "a plurality of broken people who are trying to keep each other alive." For example, as we saw in Chapter 4, at the end of Samuel Delany's 1999 book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, "fallout" unexpectedly appears as a figure for the queer urban intimacies that animate the project. Reflecting on the spontaneous encounters he shared with others on his Manhattan street as the comet Hale-Bopp passed overhead, Delany writes: "Their only fallout is that they were pleasant—and that pleasantness hangs in the street under the trees and by the brownstone stoops near which they occurred, months after Hale-Bopp has ellipsed the sun and soared again into solar night. That fallout will remain as long as I remain comfortable living here."[39] Although the term "fallout"—here used somewhat counterintuitively to describe affirmative forms of persistence—appears near the end of the text, it retroactively becomes a heuristic for understanding the text's proposed model of social ecology, in which local scenes of spontaneous, fleeting, public contact—both sexual and nonsexual—spread imperceptibly and unpredictably throughout urban spaces, in which the so-called pleasure zones of Times Square and 42nd Street "fall out" into the forms of impersonal, atmospheric "pleasantness" that make the city as a whole livable. *TSRTSB* is itself an elegy for a New York City—and an erotic way of life—before AIDS: for a time before "safe sex," for a time before the sanitization and commodification of Times Square in the name of health, safety, and "family values," for a time when the centrifugal logics of

cruising, and practices of wayward, incidental, and ephemeral contact could be the predication of queer life. In keeping with the traditional sense of the term (and its association with lasting forms of harm), the "new" Times Square—and the change it brought to queer relational practices—is no less the fallout of AIDS than are the hundreds of thousands of deaths from the disease. But if "fallout" in the sense of radioactivity is also a way of tracing the way that things remain, however imperceptibly, then the Hale-Bopp moment matters as an index of the way in which the relational forms that Delany most values—those spontaneous intimacies that emerge by accident, that persist in the form of being forgotten, that are predicated in equal measure on the coming together and the falling apart—*also* remain after and despite the apparent sanitization, normalization, and nuclearization of the New York he loves. Indeed, it also seems important here that Delany himself remains; though he may not yet be one of those "just men who live to be/90,"[40] he—unlike Rog, and unlike Monette himself—survived the crescendo of the epidemic. That *TSRTSB* embodies the lasting and dissipation of AIDS literature, in other words, is possible only because Delany himself lasts. Queer fallout, rather than solely a threat to life, thus also becomes a measure of survival, and a way of rereading what remains.

The Poetics of Fallout; or What to Make of a Diminished Thing

And here returns the relevance of queer formalism—that reading practice that, as we saw in the introduction, often replaces an interest in being at the cutting edge with attention to the "undetonated" possibilities that still "radiat[e] from the past."[41] In her 2011 essay "Still After," which wrestles with queer theory's experience of coming "after" itself, Elizabeth Freeman considers what it means to be a queer reader decades removed from the central and animating crises of the field. Meditating on her belatedness, Freeman calls this temporal distance a queer posture, arguing for the importance of reading cultural formations precisely inasmuch as they appear rearguard and outmoded:

> As both the wedding and critical theory have taught me, what keeps form from congealing is time: it's the often ludicrous anachronisms within a given object or practice that operate as portals to other uses. . . . In fact, my new work on time comes from a sense of being haunted, as many scholars in the field are, by the unrealized promises of feminism, critical race theory, AIDS activism, and queer theory. . . . [One] way of exploring the temporal axis of queer being might be to see queers as shuffling along behind form, interested in the tail ends of things, willing to be bathed in their fading light. Some of my best students . . . have said that this is what it feels like to them to have missed [the] early 1990s . . . : that they feel like they are catching up to something that is behind them. Well, me too, and I was supposedly there. (30–31)

Here, in terms whose imagery uncannily evokes the dispersed afterglow of Hale-Bopp and Chernobyl, Freeman develops language for how the past transforms and keeps from congealing in the present: while her feeling of "shuffling along behind form" initially evokes a linear temporal paradigm, it quickly shifts into the more complicated formulation "catching up to something that is behind [us]." Throughout, Freeman is haunted not by what has died and come back to life but by what never disappeared because it never fully arrived: those unrealized promises of fields thought to dwell in our past. Thus, to the extent that Freeman bears an orientation toward the future, it is not anticipatory, but recursive, attending to what the past might yet be. To come "after," in her lexicon, does not mean living in the ruins of a prior event but reading the past in the queer light of what it may still become.

Such a complex take on queer futurity is apt, given not only Freeman's body of work on temporality, but also the context in which, and for which, she was writing: the 2011 collection *After Sex?*, which invited contributors to ponder the state of queer theory at a moment when many were growing concerned that "if not already passé, it was approaching its expiration date."[42] The reasons for such concern—as expressed both in Janet Halley and Andrew Parker's introduction to the volume, and in other pieces considering the state of the field—echo the lexicon in which Nixon describes slow violence: whereas "the hectic, heady, and truly harrying days

of [the field's] birth" involved a "*crescendo*—which at the time we did not know would *diminish*—in AIDS-related death among United States gay men" (9), the temporal and affective remove from that origin means not only that "activist energies [have] *declined* sharply" (1) but also that the "authors *around whom* queer theory first crystallized seem to have spent the past decade *distancing* themselves from their previous work" (2), all emphases mine. As even this small sampling of language already begins to suggest, the challenge is one both of attenuation (decline, distance, diminution) and of centrifugal spread (a field with a diminishing center, a field whose central figures are self-distancing); reflects Kadji Amin on the broadening applicability of "queer": "While [the] *expansion* of the field of queer scholarship is undoubtedly energizing, readers may well wonder *what makes it cohere*. What makes *queer gravitate* to these points of intervention and not others? Why not, in fact, *everything*?"[43]

Powerfully, Freeman responds to such fears neither with an affirmation of the field's demise nor with a commitment to revitalizing it. Instead, once again inhabiting a belatedness that is not a too-lateness, she traces the shapes and possibilities of diminishment itself; whereas the editors invited contributors to consider what in their work is "not queer," Freeman's essay rejects the logic of "queer or not" by instead considering what is "*least* queer" in her work. This kind of asymptotic attention—of following a critical practice as it drifts toward, but perhaps never meets, its own vanishing point (a formulation which might prove the symmetrical obverse of Muñoz's utopian horizon)—not only becomes a way of heeding things (lives, events, fields, toxins, half-lives) as they persist in the form of their own diminishment,[44] but also proves to be a through line across queer thought. Consider, for instance, Delany's attention (as we saw in Chapter 4) to pleasantness as "pleasure in its *most generalized form*" (121) or Sedgwick's interest (as we saw in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 3) in how the work of both dying and companioning the dying involves only "the *most passive and most minimal* performances."[45] Indeed, the subtle registers of attention and care found in terminal regions—broadly conceived—may prove one way of tracing what I above deemed the absence of absence.

And such absence of absence also becomes legible in another thread loosely stitched across AIDS literature and queer thought: the keen, loving, grief-stricken, fundamentally ethical attention to what is "still here"—the

dying lover, the receding possibilities, the surviving friend (in more than one sense of that term). Writes Sontag, in the final lines of "The Way We Live Now," after describing how her anonymous protagonist is "*still writing* his diary," albeit in handwriting that is "becoming spidery, *less legible*": "I was thinking, Ursula said to Quentin, that the difference between a story and a painting or photograph is that in a story you can write, He's *still alive*. But in a painting or a photo you can't show 'still.' You can just show him being alive. *He's still alive*, Stephen said."[46] Writes Monette, in "No Goodbyes" (another of the *18 Elegies for Rog*): "my darling one last graze in the meadow/of you and please let your final dream be/a man not quite your size losing the whole/world but *still here* combing combing/singing your secret names till the night's gone" (5, emphasis mine). Writes Freeman, at the start of her own, much later essay: "I'm still after queer theory. This might mean: even while queer theory has been pronounced over (can I get a refund?), *I'm* embarrassingly here. And it might mean: invited to the wake of queer theory, I'm *still*, as in somewhat paralyzed, with nothing to say. And it might mean: evincing my usual incapacity to let go once I attach, I'm still *after* it; I haven't stopped desiring queer theory" (27, original emphases).

Once again, such a quality of (adverbial) attention proves to be the ground not just of queer ethics but also of queer methodology; where the *After Sex?* project is animated by a sense that the field's distance from center has led to a possible rupture, Freeman's echo of the earlier texts makes still-ness a source of continuity, and reminds us that her "incapacity to let go" is also characteristic of a broader tendency: the queer *capacity*—the queer *commitment*[47]—to keep watching, and to keep caring, both at and "after" the end. Indeed, over the course of her essay, Freeman's account of her own belatedness becomes emblematic of a field-level practice; in contrast to an approach to the field that understands queer as being "always ahead of actually existing social possibilities," Freeman makes the claim already introduced above: that "[a]nother way of exploring the temporal axis of queer being might be to see queers as shuffling along behind form, interested in the tail ends of things." That the language of "shuffling" might invoke nothing so much as the slow movement down a hospital corridor, and that the work of terminal care involves nothing if not staying "interested in the tail ends of things," reminds us that Freeman's posture of

belatedness is less exceptional than exemplary—for queer thought always has been interested in (its own) remains.[48]

Ultimately, then, Paul Saint-Amour's evocative reflection on the centrifugal spread of the field of modernism proves equally applicable to queer theory: "To return to my image of the field as a group of travelers gathered around dwindling embers, maybe the fire was never the point, *the dwindling having been the real occasion for the gathering.*"[49] Such a formulation indirectly echoes Jeff Nunokawa's own contribution to *After Sex?*, where, reflecting on the forms of companionship that burgeoned under duress during the peak of the AIDS crisis, he insists that "no one who has sat around a sickbed with a bunch of friends" (the dwindling thus being the reason for the gathering) "can doubt the *small powers* of such chatter to dispel, however briefly, the solitude that engulfs the subject of fatality: the *slight power* of the *merely sociable* to keep us together for *just a bit longer*."[50] If, here, we see one of the scales of queer lasting—"keep us together for just a bit longer" ("Thank God this moment's not the last"[51])—then so too do we see a reminder that, even within the "hectic, heady, and truly harrying days" at the epidemic's peak and the field's origin, much of the ethical and political work happened at those lower frequencies ("small," "slight," "mere," "just a bit")—that within the "(most) queer" always already sheltered the "least queer." If, as we already have seen, the field's attentions were originarily centrifugal, then these reflections help us see that they were, too, originally predicated on attenuation. For if some of the activist energies of the field emerged from that "crescendo" that "we did not know would diminish," some emerged, too, from the hard work of attending (corporeally and epistemologically) to "diminished things."[52] And so queer theory and literature—especially those works dwelling at these lower frequencies and plotless registers—may be just the place to look for the *forms* of persisting diminishment and diminishing persistence.

The experience of being "after" queer theory is, it becomes clear, hardly simply a liability, but also the precondition for relational and hermeneutic possibilities that cannot emerge in or on their own time, and that perhaps cannot be "re-presented." Indeed, as Freeman's imagery in "Still After" suggests, it may be precisely when a field has been remaindered, when it has fallen out of vogue, when it is more residual than emergent, that a different kind of illumination—"the afterglow of the forgotten"[53]—can

emerge. To put this another way: whereas the residual materials of the past too often become afterthoughts, Freeman, no less than the other authors in this project, embodies the power of queer after-thoughts, of thinking with (and in the temporality of) what remains.[54]

Falling out with Willa Cather

I want now to suggest how such a legacy of queer (after)thought can redirect critical attention from direct representation to the nonrepresentational possibilities of form and, precisely insofar as it enables a different relation to the pastness of the past, also alter our sense of the canon of literature poised to help us heed the illegible persistences of our time. Indeed, a poetics of fallout may already exist in just those forms we are thought to be done with, that have fallen out of vogue or critical currency. In so claiming, I am implicitly departing from another recent argument in ecocriticism, extending from Nixon's praise of novel genres like the "environmental picaresque" to the booming critical conversation about cli-fi to Amitav Ghosh's argument in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, which holds that the old mode of realist fiction is unequipped to represent the ruptures at stake in climate change. Placing their faith in the literary equivalent of what Donna Haraway has deemed the environmental "technofix," such critics—almost despite themselves—look insistently to a stylistic futurity equated almost entirely with what's new.

But if one lesson learned from the Babushkas' Chernobyl or Delany's Hale-Bopp or Freeman's afterglow of the forgotten is that the past persists in—and continues to shape and be shaped by—the present in unexpected and novel ways, then we might also concede that these same forms and events possess a queer capacity to *become* new—to wield new effects, to emerge in altered and unrecognizable shape. In other words, our contemporary encounter with old forms is enough to alter the definition of what it means to have followed or come *after* them. And so I want to "bathe[] in [the] fading light" of a queer novel whose formal and structural peculiarities have taught me how to think persistence as fallout and fallout as a problem of reading, and which itself might be thought to constitute a prototype of queer fallout as literary mode. To return to Willa Cather's 1925

novel *The Professor's House* may at this point seem an anachronistic—even ludicrous—move. For not only is Cather remote from the socioenvironmental concerns that animate projects like Nixon's but so too is she writing a quarter century before the term "fallout" was coined to refer to the spread of radioactive refuse.[55] (That said, it also would be overstatement to decouple Cather entirely from the discourse of radioactivity: it is worth noting that the book she was reading—and recommending to friends—while writing *The Professor's House* was Marie Curie's biography of Pierre, first published in English in 1923, which juxtaposes a chapter on the organization of the couple's marital life with a chapter on the discovery of radium.) But there is indeed a nuclear crisis at the heart of the novel: the crisis of living in—and "falling out" of—the nuclear family, itself a concept that first entered the lexicon in 1924.

As even this brief introduction—with its self-conscious gesture of anachronism—begins to suggest, I am interested here not simply in Cather's novel but also in what it means to arrive late to her work, and to be *still after* her, a hundred years removed from the publication of *The Professor's House*. In what follows, I take both our belated posture relative to Cather's work and her own affirmatively backward posture as inspiration for an interpretive practice in which we read various (dislocated) presents back into hers, which also means, following Freeman, reading the past in the queer light of what it can now become. If, in Chapter 3, I interpreted Allen Barnett's "Philostorgy, Now Obscure" as a kind of uncanny and unintentional echo of *The Professor's House*, here I am listening for what Caitlin DeSilvey has described as the "inverse of an echo, the presence that casts itself back from the future."[56] And I am joining Freeman in considering how the "ludicrous anachronisms within a given object" can "operate as portals to other uses." This means not only letting AIDS literature, queer theory, and nuclear fallout drift backwards, toward a text from 1925, but also considering how our posture of being *after* Cather—of reading her belatedly, and perhaps desiringly—alters how we relate to the dimensions of her work from which we would rather dissociate ourselves. For I am still, "*embarrassingly* here," lingering with a text that many critics have suggested we should move on from, and that I perhaps already have interpretively exhausted earlier in this project. Like Freeman, I want to "dar[e] to ask a question that seem[s] banal, even rearguard" and consider how it "might produce a leap forward of some sort."[57] What might happen

if we stay with Willa Cather? Might queerly falling out with her—in the sense both of heeding her dissipative poetics and of developing a new relation out of our divergence from her politics—help us make sense of our dislocated present anew? Following Neimanis and Hamilton, might the fallout both in and of her text be where the possibility for something else lies?

As we saw in Chapter 2, the book, which Cather characterized as her "middle-aged novel," is a portrait of adult *ennui*, the story of a man whose best days have passed him by, if they ever arrived at all. It opens with Godfrey St. Peter, a history professor at a university in the Midwestern town of Hamilton, standing in the wake of his family life: "The moving was over and done. Professor St. Peter was alone in the dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters."[58] The first thing we learn about this character is that he has decided to remain in the home from which the rest of his family has moved out: a now empty rental in which he had written his life's work, a set of volumes on the Spanish adventurers that recently earned him the Oxford Prize for History, whose monetary award allowed him to buy the property into which he does not wish to move. The old study retains its appeal not just on account of familiarity, but because its lone window still offers a glimpse the blue swath of Lake Michigan on the horizon, and because its walls still retain the memory of Tom Outland, his prized former pupil, his daughter's former fiancé, and his own most intimate companion, who died years before at war. Prismatically stitched through the book is Tom's persistence in the family's life—not as presence, but as an *absence of absence*. Indeed, Tom is simultaneously a kind of fracture (or fission) at the heart of the family and that family's ever-tenuous lymph or glue.

But lest this description suggest that the death of Tom is the book's central catastrophe, it is worth noting that Cather—in keeping with her reticence about explicit sociopolitical themes—is writing neither a war novel, nor the story of family trauma. Rather, to the extent that the novel can be said to trace the quiet repercussions of an animating event, that event is simply marriage itself, and its repercussions simply the way in which the initial intensity of the conjugal bond disperses into the not unpleasant affiliations of family life. In other words, normative adulthood—and the burgeoning weakness of its hold on the Professor—is (to borrow Mike Davis's redolent phrase) the "ordinary disaster" that preoccupies this

book.[59] Indeed, the tragedy of the novel is expressed not in terms of any kind of tragic flaw or characterological downfall, but rather in far less gravitational (or centripetal) terms. Eight pages from the end, the Professor, alone again in his study, finally finds the language for his predicament: "'In great misfortunes,' he told himself, 'people want to be alone. They have a right to be. And the misfortunes that occur within one are the greatest. Surely the saddest thing in the world is *falling out* of love—if once one has ever fallen in.' *Falling out*, for him, seemed to mean *falling out* of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed" (250, emphases mine).

To read *The Professor's House* as tracing its protagonist's "falling out" (of love, of all domestic and social relations, of his place in the human family) helps us to make sense of both the novel's famously enigmatic structure—a topic to which I will shortly return—and Godfrey St. Peter's queer turn as literary protagonist. For Godfrey is a character characterized by lassitude and enervation, and the novel itself, far from narrating development or change, traces a course from stasis to a near-death experience, its protagonist evincing increasing disinterest in virtually everything (marriage, family, career, desire, futurity) that has constituted his normative life. Indeed, *The Professor's House*, no less than its queer cognate "Philostorgy, Now Obscure," radiates with the question that Philip Gambone reads as animating the entirety of Barnett's *The Body and Its Dangers* (the collection in which "Philostorgy" appears): "*What to make of a diminished thing?*"[60]

When considered within the logic and lexicon of fallout, however, *The Professor's House* can be read not only as narrating a diminishing "life" but also, and more specifically, as tracing the shape of queer "half-lives," a calculus that becomes legible in the fact that the Professor has lived "two lives" and had "two youths" and experienced "two romances," leaving each one in turn to be experienced as a kind of "half." Near the end of the novel's first section, when Godfrey announces his decision not to join his family for their summer in France, his wife, Lillian, gestures toward the centrifugal movement that will belatedly emerge as a heuristic for the novel as a whole:

> "Godfrey," she said slowly and sadly, "I wonder what it is that makes you *draw away from* your family. Or who it is."

> “My dear, are you going to be jealous?”
>
> “I wish I were going to be. I’d much rather see you foolish about some woman than becoming lonely and inhuman.” (141)

When juxtaposed with the earlier passage, what emerges here is an understanding of Godfrey’s “falling out” (of the human family) as itself a kind of queer “becoming” (lonely and inhuman), a conjuncture that in turn renders the novel’s trajectory less the movement toward an integrated or coherent self, or toward the codified relational bonds that culminate the marriage plot, than the unraveling of such entities.

Importantly, the “nuclear fallout” that quietly animates St. Peter’s life also afflicts the novel’s form. While Cather wrote that she found the novel (otherwise “a nasty, grim little tale”) “fascinating in form,” her critics and contemporaneous readers responded less with affirmative fascination than with skeptical perplexity.[61] For the problem with the book’s tripartite structure—which interrupts the narrative of the Professor’s life with a local color sketch of Tom Outland’s adolescent summer on a mesa—is that the novel’s center is simply not strong enough to hold the rest together as a unified or coherent whole. On my reading, however, this weakness itself indexes the book’s adaptation of fallout as an affirmative methodological principle. In other words, it is not, as Yeats would have it, that “things fall apart, the center cannot hold”; instead, Cather—an anti- or para-modernist (depending on your view)—traces how the center is *able* not to hold, limning the relational and interpretive possibilities that burgeon precisely when we decouple a novel from its nucleus. In so doing, Cather elaborates her own poetics of fallout, a mode of composition by means of decomposition which renders the oft-illegible persistence of dispersal and decay an immanent condition of literary form.

As figure 5.1 demonstrates, *The Professor’s House* unfolds—or, perhaps, unravels—across three progressively shorter sections of text which embody “The Professor”’s movement—or precipitation—out of “The Family,” a trajectory catalyzed by Tom Outland’s characterological and structural role in the narrative. For part of what inaugurates the Professor’s fallout is the nuclear instability (or the surplus energy) introduced by his student; where his wife enigmatically laments that “it wasn’t the children who came between us” (78), both the content and the form of the novel reveal that

“Tom Outland’s Story” is what comes between the Professor and his family, fracturing their bond at the same time that it tenuously sutures them together. Much as the reverberating possibilities of Tom’s life (and his early death) propel Godfrey’s centrifugal drift, the appeal of “Tom Outland’s Story” propels readerly attention beyond the cluttered domestic interiors and petty dramas that constitute the novel’s overfilled opening section. The center section of the novel “hurl[s] [our] energies” out of the nuclear family and into the homosocial “happy family” (176) consisting of three men on a southwest mesa, out of domestic claustrophobia and into the airy exteriors of Outland’s New Mexico, and out of the narratological and compositional present and multiply into the past (via a narrative that predates the chronology of the fabula, via the incursion of a nineteenth-century regionalist sketch into the para-modernist novel, via a piece of writing that Cather herself composed before envisioning the novel as a whole). If the sheer contrast, the radical heterogeneity, between his own middle (and middling) adulthood and Tom’s youthful exploits is part of what instigates Godfrey’s falling out of the “human family,” then that same mismatch also propels the novel’s own falling apart, insofar as “Tom Outland’s Story,” as and at the heart of the story of Godfrey’s adult life, cannot possibly pull the narrative together into a coherent whole.

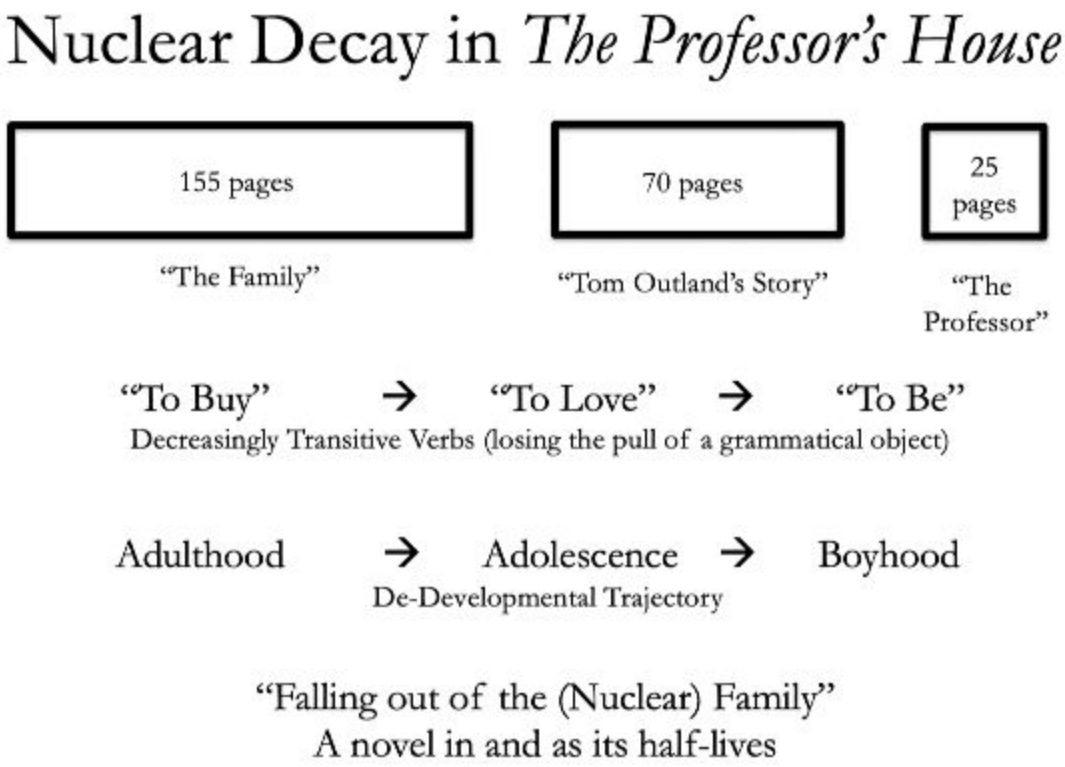

Nuclear Decay in *The Professor's House*
155 pages
70 pages
25 pages
"The Family"
"Tom Outland's Story"
"The Professor"
"To Buy" → "To Love" → "To Be"
Decreasingly Transitive Verbs (losing the pull of a grammatical object)
Adulthood → Adolescence → Boyhood
De-Developmental Trajectory
"Falling out of the (Nuclear) Family"
A novel in and as its half-lives

Figure 5.1 Nuclear Decay in *The Professor's House*

In such a reading, what Reynolds deemed the novel's "formal disintegration" (here, a product of the centrifugal forces not [solely] of historical change but [also] internal to family life itself) is an affirmative principle predicated precisely upon the simultaneous weakness and power of its center, the "narrative middle" of this "middle-aged novel."[62] For there are, in fact, many ways of making sense of the tripartite structure, once we relinquish a desire for narrative and temporal coherence, or for a narrative coupled to its protagonist by proprietary logics. What emerges across the three sections is the de-developmental arc of a narrative that takes Godfrey from adulthood through a surrogate adolescence on the mesa and ultimately into a queer return to his boyhood self; a trajectory through decreasingly transitive verbs (from "to buy," the privileged verb of the opening section, through "to love," the privileged verb of both "Tom Outland's Story" and the Professor's own more normative adolescence, and finally, in the biblically simple syntax of the novel's incantatory final pages, "to be"); and

a structure of geometrically shorter sections whose momentum is predicated on relinquishment.

One way of reading the book, then, is that Cather (like St. Peter himself) cultivates a "novel . . . dissipation" (239), letting the traditional novel unravel as she disrupts it with a local color sketch and allows her protagonist to fall out from the lines of his own life story. By the end, St. Peter perhaps does become, per Lillian's accusation, "lonely and inhuman," a phenomenon that reflects his tendency to drift outside the realm of protagonist and that signals Cather's own tendency to un-realize her main character along with her own narrative arc, un-furnishing the novel until it evokes the empty rental house with which it begins.[63] Queerly, the book gains both its length and momentum from this dissipation; as is true with half-life, it requires us to count up by counting down and to measure persistence in diminishment, through pages that accumulate precisely in and as the Professor's—and the novel's own—nuclear decay.

As this decay itself culminates, the book yields new language for the Professor's stance toward a self fallen out: "He did not regret his life, but he was *indifferent to it*. It seemed to him like the life of another person" (243, emphasis mine). Less a symptom of psychic rupture than of the dissipation that characterizes his life (and the novel as a whole), this "indifference" constitutes the affective analog to reading at its "least queer" or pleasure at its "most generalized": it is a way of limning affect as its traces, of heeding what remains if only in the most minimal forms of presence. (At the end of the novel, perhaps all we can say about Godfrey is that he, too, is *still here*.) And just as Cather's grammar accommodates fallout in its evocations of the capacious subjunctives of Latin,[64] a dead language, her approach to affect is itself the non-mimetic lasting of earlier moments in American literary regionalism, especially the work of Sarah Orne Jewett, for whom "indifference" is perhaps the most capacious and varied descriptor of affirmative dispassion.[65]

And here we might encounter again Nixon's urgent, passionate call for representation, albeit in the form of its own strange dislocation, as we notice anew the descriptors that he attaches to those forms of slow violence that necessitate conversion into narrative: "disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-

driven technologies of our image-world." Perhaps this offers the most apt description of Cather's poetics of fallout: slow moving and long in the making, starring the anonymous nobody that St. Peter turns out to be, attritional in its shape, propelled, indeed, by the Professor's "indifferent interest" in his own existence. Now we—like Freeman, like the Professor himself, like queer theory and ecocriticism alike—may finally have caught up to what is behind us.

Ardor Unbound; or, Falling Out of Love

And perhaps we have caught up not only to the beginning of this chapter, but also, and more complexly, to the beginning of this project as a whole. For when I try to articulate the interpretive work of the previous section, I can do no better than this: "Love of a book, even a sinister book, love that generates out of concentrated meditation on its pieces a different and needed book; the transformative, frankly instrumental love of the artifacts of a culture, threatening though that culture may itself be. . . ." If these words do not immediately call up the name of their author, then the obliquity likely fades when we follow the sentence all the way to its end: "perhaps no impulse has less warrant than such love in the climate of a hermeneutic of suspicion."[66] The writer, of course, is Sedgwick, offering an account of reparative reading not as it was codified in full-length form in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (1997) or, with additional revisions, in *Touching Feeling* (2003), but as it first appeared: as a slight, four-page introduction to the "Queerer than Fiction" special issue of *Studies in the Novel* that she edited in 1996. Interestingly, although her revision process primarily involved expansion, this paragraph—which in the initial version followed the now-famous section that details the oscillating relationship between the paranoid and depressive positions in Melanie Klein's work, and concludes "Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love"—fell out of the essay, and thus has fallen out of our common understanding of its argument. But heeding the residue of this "fallout" promises to alter how we understand our relationship to, and the persistent relevance of, nominally outmoded works.

Although the argumentative emphasis on love diminished as the essay was revised and republished, that term was very much at the heart of

Sedgwick's thinking about reading in the mid-1990s. Near the end of their 1995 coauthored essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," Sedgwick and Adam Frank wonder: "What does it mean to fall in love with a writer? What does it mean, for that matter—or maybe we should ask, what else could it mean—to cathect in a similar way a theoretical moment not one's own?"[67] These questions are not unmotivated, but rather—in a manner not dissimilar from the work of the reparative reading essay—lead to a critique of certain routinized habits of interpretation:

> The moralistic hygiene by which any reader of today is unchallengeably entitled to condescend to the thought of any moment in the past (maybe especially the recent past) is globally available to anyone who masters the application of two or three discrediting questions. How provisional, by contrast, how difficult to reconstruct, and how exorbitantly specialized of use are the tools that in any given case would allow one to ask, What was it possible to think or do at a certain moment of the past that no longer is? And how are those possibilities to be found, unfolded, allowed to move and draw air and seek new voices and uses in the very different disciplinary ecology of even a few decades' distance? (521)

Falling in love with a text from the past is here aligned with a particular hermeneutic practice, one that takes belatedness as the occasion for a different tenor of relation. If our critique of a text's—or an author's—failures is a product of our (temporal and political) distance from it, then that very distance—as this chapter has sought to suggest across its many movements—can also ground alternate hermeneutic possibilities. To stay with Sedgwick is to avow, and inhabit, and practice alternatives to, the fundamentally anticipatory posture that characterizes paranoid reading—which, in Freeman's words, allows one to feel "*more* evolved than one's context" (30, emphasis mine)—or the (not wholly unrelated) anticipatory historiographical practices from which Coviello demurs, which find in mid-nineteenth-century texts harbingers of the (codified) understandings of sexuality yet to come and encourage us to "imagine how much *more* we know now than we did then" (42). Reparative reading does not, by contrast,

automatically privilege the *less* knowing, or the practice of knowing *less* (even as some contemporary critics have contended just this); rather, it heeds the many magnitudes, the varying orders of intensity, the adverbial modifications, involved in ecologies of knowing, displacing an emphasis on "global" claims of "master[y]" in favor of provisional, partial, context-specific practices of thought. Given that reparative reading, like any weak theoretical practice, refuses to lose track of the parts in the whole, it may not be surprising that other critics' description of the practice often takes on a by-now-familiar shape: In contrast to a strong theory that, in Saint-Amour's description, "tends to become increasingly totalizing, coherentist, and teleological," weak theoretical practices like those involved in reparative reading are, in Wai Chee Dimock's terms, "centrifugal";[68] indeed, Robert Azzarello argues that, over the course of her career, Sedgwick traces "a centrifugal desire away from the paranoid center of literary criticism."[69]

And here the question of "falling out" might return, in slightly transfigured form. For Sedgwick's model of reparative reading is famous for arguing that the reparative gesture can help find sustenance in a culture that is inimical to queer thriving and survival. But what the essay's fallen out paragraph—with its passing reference to the "sinister" text—avows more explicitly is that the reparative gesture can also make something new of and from the *text* that seems inimical to "the way we live now." In other words: although both of the passages above invoke "love," the reading practice that Sedgwick describes in the first may involve less the process of *falling in love* than the process of *falling out* of it. For it may be that we are able to read the needed book in the pieces of the sinister book only once we avow that the book is, or is no longer, the book that we need, once we acknowledge the limits of its capacity to do the work that the present demands, once we deem it failed or flawed or sinister. But it is also necessary to have loved it once, and to love it in some manner still, in order to be willing to sit with it patiently ("the apprehension requires a certain stillness"), to trust that it has something to offer, to read not for the whole in the parts but for the parts in the (eroding or decaying) whole. And once we have let the whole fall out into its parts, we may be able to construct other possibilities, and even a new whole—one that, as Sedgwick insistently reminds us, is "*not necessarily like any preexisting whole*."[70] And so the "different and needed book" proves continuous with, but non-identical

(perhaps even non-resembling?) to, the "sinister book" from whose pieces it emerged.

I am not quite ready to deem Cather's work "sinister"; as my argument in Chapter 2 indicated, I understand her politics—and, specifically, the politics implied by her form—to be more subtle and capacious than many recent readings of her would suggest, and I certainly do not feel inclined to dispense with her entirely. But when I reflect on my longstanding—and evolving—attachment to her (body of) work, I once again hear in my head one refrain of this chapter: what does one make of a diminished thing? I am, perhaps, falling out of love with Cather, in the manner that I see Sedgwick implicitly articulating. And as Neimanis and Hamilton invite us to imagine, within this breaking there also can be a kind of making, a falling into a different—and differently ethical—relation. To fall out of love with an author, in other words, involves something between holding on to her texts as they were and abandoning them, and something between wholesale critique or wholehearted defense. This space between—like the ontological crack, like the window between obscurity and obsolescence, like the space between belatedness and too-lateness—proves to have its own dimensionality, to involve its own set of ethical practices, to yield its own forms of possibility. And, again like the ontological crack, such a space invites particular postures of attention; my own reading practice is the product of holding onto both Cather and reparative reading with the loose clutch—the open palm—that both, to my mind, so deeply deserve.

With this loose clutch, we may return one final time to Sedgwick. For while the Silvan Tomkins essay invokes but does not define the act of falling in love, Sedgwick's 1999 book *A Dialogue on Love*—an experimental memoir about her experience of being in therapy while terminally ill—does just that. Clarifying what she meant in telling a friend that she thought she might be falling in love with Shannon, her therapist, she writes:

> Oh, right. I keep forgetting, for lots and lots people in the world, the notion of 'falling in love' has (of all things) sexual connotations. . . . For me, what falling in love means is different. It's a matter of suddenly, globally, 'knowing,' that another person represents your only access to some vitally

> transmissible truth
> or radiantly heightened
> mode of perception,
>
> and that if you lose the thread of this intimacy, both your soul and your whole world might subsist forever in some desert-like state of ontological impoverishment.[71]

If "falling in" involves the sudden experience of knowing the fact of another's (or a text's) *exceptionality*—that they are your *only* access to something vital, something radiantly heightened—then perhaps falling out of love, rather than its symmetrical opposite, is in fact the gradual process of *generalizing* the possibility that the other person introduced, of letting the heightened radiance disperse into the afterglow present at the tail end of things. Indeed, if falling in love involves the fear that "*los[ing]* the thread of this intimacy" will lead to ontological impoverishment, then falling out of love may involve the "art of *loosing*" that thread, the work of unraveling so often involved in the terminal condition here becoming a way of gently disentangling the mode of perception from the other who occasioned it. And lest such a formulation risk sounding a note of resignation, recall Coviello: "Who knows how the ordinary things of the world might find themselves reconfigured by the force of a love unloosed?"

Here, we might, one final time, spin the argument of the previous chapters outward, feeling the force of that love unloosed, and sensing the many ways in which the past uncannily lasts. We might let the "not love relationships" (56) involved in Samuel Delany's practices of cruising unspool into the promiscuous species of love—*philo*—found in AIDS literature. We might unconjugate the verb "to love" with the adult Godfrey St. Peter until he becomes his boyhood self once again, and trace his life back to its own (etymological) roots. And we might let Sedgwick's experience of "falling in love" with her dying friend Michael Lynch, like the *Pointed Firs* narrator's experience of "falling in love" with the dying town of Dunnet Landing, be transfigured by the practice of reparative reading, which we now can understand as involving not only the practice of befriending the terminally ill but also—in keeping with the complex rhythms of relinquishment at stake in AIDS-era care—the simultaneous

work of falling out of love. Where I began Chapter 1 by challenging one presumption of mainstream environmental rhetoric, considering what could become possible if we, informed by the political and ethical practices of queer life, stopped trying to save the earth, let me conclude this final chapter by letting another question, this one equally counterintuitive, hang in the air: What might become possible if, instead of chastely (and benignly) "loving" the planet—an injunction that too often leads to structurally conservative practices, undertaken with the goal of preserving the world as it is—we instead worked to queerly *fall out of love* with it? For "[w]ho knows what objects a person's ardor, once unbound, might transform"?[72]

Epilogue

The Gays and the Grays

In a 2018 article in the *Deseret News*, Dr. Kristen Ries—for many years the only physician in the state of Utah willing to care for people with AIDS—reflected on the scene in her office in the 1980s, when patient attrition left her working with two primary constituents: HIV+ gay men and the elderly. The demographics of her practice, referred to by other doctors as "the AIDS and the aged" or "the gays and the grays," meant that in the waiting room "gay guys helped old ladies with their knitting while they shared funeral plans and their hopes for the afterlife."[1] On the other side of the door, in brightly lit offices, sat patients linked by mortality and Medicaid—and those who tended to them, two lesbian medical professionals and several Sisters of the Holy Cross, a collective of unmarried women who together spun a practice out of tenderness and touch. In the meeting of the elderly knitters and the gay men, we not only witness a scene of intergenerational friendship borne out of a shared proximity to death, but also find in one room the demographics of the two halves of this book, which as yet have met primarily in the form of formal echoes and uncanny parallels and historical coincidences. Yet here, if we abstract our attention slightly, we might see Willa Cather conversing with Essex Hemphill, or the *Pointed Firs* narrator sitting silently beside Preston and Roxy, or Eve Sedgwick "loosing" Elijah Tilley's "threads of time," or the fictional town of Dunnet Landing blurring into the very real Bay Area of another coast.

Throughout this project, I have traced resonances between the 1890s and the 1980s, in the process offering an alternate genealogy for American queer writing, one that takes seriously the formal and stylistic similarities between the work of queer female regionalist writers and the work of gay men writing in and about the peak of the AIDS crisis. As with queer ecocriticism, where I am interested less in sites of friction between the fields than in inhabiting the blurry edges of each, that realm where they might in fact already meet, generically, I have leaned into shared

tendencies, lingering over ways in which the two archives come to resemble each other. If, in this approach, AIDS texts often echo the characteristics—and become the queer cognates—of regionalist fiction, then perhaps it is only apt that here, in Dr. Ries's medical practice, we feel the crossing move in the opposite direction. For where my reading of *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* sought to demonstrate how practices of cruising—and cultures of public sex more generally—are, for Delany, also matters of lasting and care, then Ries's example reveals how a tradition of spinsterly care can also be the ground for queer eroticism. As *Quiet Heroes*, the 2018 documentary about Ries's AIDS-era work, makes clear, medical partners Ries and Maggie Snyder ultimately became romantic partners—building a life together that, far from being traditionally domestic or nuclear, incorporated the lives and deaths, the living and dying, the fading and lasting, of others. In caring for the dying, they found each other and themselves, found the strength to keep going even when, as the deaths mounted, they—like Melvin Dixon in "One By One"—couldn't bear to keep up the count.[2]

When we inhabit this multidirectional fold, and let the 1890s and 1980s meet in all their complexity, we might take Ries's Salt Lake City waiting room as a latter day "waiting place," that mythologized landscape "way up north beyond the ice" described by Captain Littlepage in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, "where there was neither living nor dead," and which seemed "a kind of waiting-place between this world and the next."[3] And we can recall how, in his 1959 article insisting upon regionalism's futurelessness, Warner Berthoff linked that "fearful mid-world" to Dunnet Landing itself; after describing the haunting qualities of the former, he wrote: "good reason then to choose to stay home—even though it must be to wither and stiffen in a setting which, in its mild and permissive way, is only another kind of mid-world, half way over to death."[4] But the texts in this project have demonstrated all that becomes possible within the intransitive grammars and dilated temporalities of precisely such waiting places (the bedside and the hospice room; the grocery store checkout line and the moviehouse; the attic study of a professor whose best days are behind him and the "ontological crack between the living and the dead"), especially when we do the hard work required to companion and care and make space for one another there. And so too have they demonstrated the affordances of these "half way" and "mid-world" spaces themselves, revealing them as less a falling off than the queer *falling out* from sites of nominal wholeness. Half-

and mid-lives, in other words, both embody the dissipated lasting of earlier moments and, precisely in their apparent brokenness, become the material basis of an ongoing remaking, offering the possibility of assembling "something like a whole—though," as Sedgwick "would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*."[5]

In a complementary inverse to Muñoz's vision of queer utopia (no-place), which invokes a future shimmering in and as its formlessness, the specific places (or *topoi*) that have shaped this project—from the small towns of regionalist fiction to the waiting rooms of AIDS literature to the classrooms of Portland State—have taught me to read, and to inhabit, the many *forms* of lasting that futurelessness can yield. The book as a whole, then, might be understood—much like Chapter 1 understood *Pointed Firs* itself—as a geography of terminal regions, one that maps the topology of queer futurelessness lived as queer lasting. In the process, it reveals futurelessness, terminality, and extinction themselves to be the climates not simply of the queer 1890s and 1980s, but also of contemporary life. *Queer Lasting* traces changes within these climates, the verbal grammars of queer literature proving an instrument that renders legible subtle shifts in condition, and illuminates subtle shapes of possibility, too often cast into shadow by both the insistent vitalism of mainstream environmentalism and the gravitational pull of "futures" in liberatory scholarship. Inspired by this legacy of queer thought, may we find ways to act *up* and wait *beside* and open *around* and fall *out* together within a terminal present, and may we thus continue the collective work of learning how to last.

Acknowledgments

As I reach the end of a writing process that has companioned me across several states, multiple jobs, and a decade of my life, what lasts is gratitude. Although this book is not based on my dissertation, my first thanks go to my teachers at Cornell University: Shirley Samuels, who taught me to read the nineteenth century; Rick Bogel, who fostered my formalist and grammatical inclinations; Aaron Sachs, who helped me to understand my idiosyncratic method as itself a craft; and Anne-Lise François, who transfigured so much, and made me an ecocritic in the process. I also am grateful to fellow Ithacans Shilo McGiff, who reminds me just how beautiful ideas can be; Sarah Weiger, whose presence has buoyed me from Ann Arbor to Ithaca to Portland and back again; and Jacob Brogan, Brigitte Fielder, Heather Furnas, Melissa Gniadek, Julie Joosten, Amy Kohout, Daegan Miller, Jonathan Senchyne, Lynne Stahl, and Cecily Swanson, who continue to shape my thinking, long after we last sat around a table together.

My colleagues at Portland State University—including John Beer, Joel Bettridge, Liz Ceppi, Michael Clark, Paul Collins, Josh Epstein, Abbey Gaterud, Per Henningsgaard, Maude Hines, Alastair Hunt, Roxanne James, Susan Kirtley, Marcia Klotz, Bill Knight, Bishupal Limbu, Sarah Lincoln, Marie Lo, Catherine McNeur, Lee Medovoi, Lorraine Mercer, Hildy Miller, Anoop Mirpuri, Jonathan Walker, Leni Zumas, and the late Eliza Greenstadt—embody how and why to do this work; I am forever grateful for the years I spent with them. I thank Liz in particular for the gift of her friendship; I still want to be her when I grow up. So too am I grateful to PSU students Alexa Climaldi, Ava Dean, Miriam Gonzales, C.R. Grimmer, Ben Hawkins, Shezad Khan, Sarah Marshall, Alex Meyers, Elizabeth Miossec-Backer, Angelica Paz Ortiz, Courtney Palmer, Finn Turner, Thom van Camp, and Jake Warren, among others, for our sustained, and sustaining, exchange of ideas. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, Sam Bakkila shaped my thinking about Willa Cather, and much else besides. PSU-AAUP taught me the power of an academic union. In Oregon City, the late and forever beloved Gerry Pearson gave me a sense of home when I needed it most.

To thank my colleagues at the University of Michigan is no easy task, since many of them also were the professors who first introduced me to literary studies. Everyone should be so fortunate to have a friend like John Whittier-Ferguson, who—for more than two decades—has been my model for how to inhabit this profession and live this life. Yopie Prins first made this work imaginable for me, and continues to illuminate what's possible. Valerie Traub's influence is evident whenever my thinking here is most bravely precise; I hope she will take the moments when that precision dissipates as promises to keep learning from her. Sara Blair, Marjorie Levinson, and Adela Pinch, too, are my longtime teachers; I know how lucky I am.

Those Michigan colleagues whom I met more recently have shaped my work no less deeply. Hadji Bakara has improved my thinking about futures, among many other topics; I thank him and Molly Lynch (and Dash) for their friendship, and thank Molly for writing the novel I needed to read. Megan Ewing's care and brilliance transform everything they touch, including my life and this book. Meg Sweeney (my Cosmic Cousin) has helped me inhabit the warp and weft of my ideas, while teaching me how to mend. Charlotte Karem Albrecht, Theresa Braunschneider, Nick Caverly, Gregg Crane, Henry Cowles, Gaurav Desai, Anna Watkins Fisher, Anna Freidin, Kyle Frisina, Joey Gamble, June Howard, Tung-Hui Hu, Jane Johnson, Aliyah Khan, Petra Kuppers, Josh Miller, Supriya Nair, David Porter, Cathy Sanok, Abby Stewart, Ruby Tapia, Antoine Traisnel, Gillian White, and Elizabeth Wingrove all have done more than they know to inspire this project. At the Institute for the Humanities, where I held the 2019–20 Steelcase Faculty Fellowship, Peggy McCracken (herself a cherished colleague) cultivated an enlivening collective, while my fellow fellows improved my extinction chapter with their readings. Scotti Parrish led a book proposal workshop that helped me take a leap forward; imagining her as my reader has made my project better, and having her as a friend has done the same for my life. UM students Surabhi Balachander, Leila Braun, Emily Coccia, Catherine Fairfield, Jeremy Glover, Katherine Hummel, Sarah Jane Kerwin, Carl Lavigne, Isabel Neal, Katy Rossing, and Lauren Rudewicz all taught me more than I taught them. The 2018 Queer Ecologies crew reminded me what community can do.

In 2020, I took a leap of faith and moved to the University of Wisconsin-Madison at the height of the pandemic. I knew the risk; the gift of the years

since has been living the reward. Monique Allewaert has been making things possible in my career since well before I knew her personally; her friendship and brilliance now make Madison feel like home. Caroline Gottschalk Druschke has hung out with me in the middle of these ideas—as if they were a river or a prairie—and has lit them up with her mind and heart alike. (Thanks, too, to Bear and Bode for the key consults and inspiration.) Joshua Calhoun manages to have just the right insight, pep talk, or basketball card for every occasion. Monique, Caroline, Josh, Frédéric Neyrat, Mario Ortiz-Robles, Kirk Sides, Heather Swan, and Kyle Webert have been dream collaborators in the environmental humanities. Ramzi Fawaz has helped me give form to many a queer thought, while setting the Wisconsin winters aglow with his incandescence. Leslie Bow, Russ Castronovo, and David Zimmerman are cherished interlocutors about all things intellectual, pedagogical, and institutional; their advice has helped me navigate many a pivotal moment. As chairs, Christa Olson and Anja Wanner have been unfailingly supportive. Laila Amine, Claus Elholm Andersen, Erin Polnaszek Boyd, Jill Casid, Lisa Cooper, Cindy I-Fen Cheng, Theresa Delgadillo, Aparna Dharwadker, Vinay Dharwadker, Ainehi Edoro, Ruth Llana Fernández, Martin Foys, Ralph Grunewald, Kristina Huang, Theresa Kelley, Raquel Kennon, Amadi Ozier, Amanda Shubert, Adam Stern, Mark Vareschi, Sarah Ann Wells, Morris Young, Timothy Yu, and Sunny Yudkoff all have shaped this book with their questions, their engagement, and the model of their work. Spring Sherrod, Pam Chizek, and Will Kelly have oriented me to the institution. My students—including Dana Craig, Doron Darnov, Sarah Egan, Cherise Fung, Anna Gebarski, Kuhelika Ghosh, Addie Hopes, Emery Jenson, Maia Kurr, Sirkka Miller, Kaitlin Moore, Becca Owen, Daniele Santucci, Josiah Stork, and Noah Terrell—inspire me; the 2021 Queer Ecologies crew made the fatiguing glow of Zoom into a source of genuine illumination.

A First Book Workshop at the Center for the Humanities helped me refine the argument of this project. I thank Russ Castronovo and Megan Massino for organizing, Peter Coviello and Astrida Neimanis for their incisive feedback, and UW colleagues Russ, Monique, Ramzi, and Jill for bringing their collective brilliance to the conversation. Around the same time, Heath Sledge carefully and insightfully attended to every word I had written. At the Institute for Research in the Humanities, where I was fortunate to be in residence as I completed revisions, Steven Nadler, Katie

Apsey, and Lizzie Neary cultivated a wonderfully collegial environment, while my fellow fellows consistently inspired.

Intellectual communities beyond my home institutions also have shaped my work. Priscilla Wald knew that I was writing this book before I did; I thank her for glimpsing in some pages I workshopped at the 2015 First Book Institute the possibility of a different project entirely. I am one of many happily indebted to her and Sean Goudie, and can only promise to pay it forward. Conversations with my fellow FBI participants and Chris Castiglia made this book better before I had even fully conceived of it; Phil Maciak shut down a State College bar with me talking about secularism and Eve Sedgwick, and has shaped my way of thinking ever since. Audiences at Washington University in St. Louis, Yale University, Rice University, The University of Virginia, and The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment at University College London offered helpful feedback on works-in-progress; I am grateful to Mel Micir, Greta LaFleur, Travis Alexander, Brian Teare, and Tim Waterman for their invitations and engagement. At the PSU Archives, Carolee Harrison and Cris Paschild granted me access to the Vanport papers.

At NYU Press, I am grateful to Eric Zinner and Furqan Sayeed, who shepherded this book through the publication process with tremendous skill and generosity, making it stronger along the way; to series editors Ann Pellegrini, Tavia Nyong'o, and Joshua Chambers-Letson for their faith in my work; and to two readers, whose generous, sustained engagement energized my thinking and improved my argument immeasurably. I also thank Ainee Jeong for expertly facilitating production; Dolma Ombadykow for editing the manuscript with precision; Mary Beth Jarrad, Lia Hagen, Madison Greene, and Sydney Garcia for their thoughtful and responsive work on marketing; and Arc Indexing for producing the index with care. Parts of Chapter 1 previously were published as "Terminal Regions: Queer Ecocriticism at the End," in *Against Life*, eds. Alastair Hunt and Stephanie Youngblood (Northwestern University Press, 2016) and are reprinted here with permission. Parts of Chapter 4 previously appeared in "Queer Fallout: Samuel R. Delany and the Ecology of Cruising" (*Environmental Humanities* 9 no. 1 [2017]): 149–166 and "The Ecopoetics of Contact: Touching, Cruising, Gleaning (ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment 25, no. 1 [2018]): 150–168; they appear here with the

permission of Duke University Press and Oxford University Press, respectively.

Finally, I am profoundly thankful for my longtime friends Lauren Shumejda, Suzanne Spring, Dargie Bowersock, Tim Eash, Kari Santoro Beer and Adam Beer, John and Judy Jordan, Vaughan and Teri Rademeyer, Lauren Foley, Todd Gilbert, and Anthony Stark, and for the families known as my Ann Arbor cousins. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents, Doug and Joy, who taught me to believe in the good that language can do and have been endlessly supportive of all that my embrace of that principle has entailed. My sister, Hannah, is my model for how to write bravely, care deeply, and live fully. Among the many gifts she has given me is that of being Aisha Sabatini Sloan's sister-in-law, and, more recently, of being Ilona's aunt. Elizabeth Brown Ensor, my beloved Nana, began writing poetry late in her life; she did not live to hold this book, but I hope that, wherever she is now, she's finding the poems in these words.

Thabo and the late great Henry LeBron James have been devoted feline companions, cajoling me to look up from the computer and keeping me company when I refuse. Ingrid Diran has thought every turn of this book along with me, and her brilliance has illuminated its farthest reaches. We have lived in more houses than I care to count over the years it has taken me to write this book; fortunately, wherever she is is my home. *Queer Lasting*—like so much else—is for her.

Notes

Preface

1 “Decaying” is Gordon B. Dodds’s term in *The College That Would Not Die: The First Fifty Years of Portland State University, 1946–1996* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2000), 2. “Deteriorating” is Natasha Geiling’s in “How Oregon’s Second Largest City Vanished in a Day” (*Smithsonian*, February 18, 2015, www.smithsonianmag.com). The history of Vanport is inextricable from the racial history of Oregon; one-third of the 18,500 residents still there in 1948 were African American, as the housing project offered an option for housing in a heavily redlined city within a state shaped by racial exclusion laws. (Following exclusion laws passed by the provisional government in 1844 and 1849, the state constitution, ratified in 1857, made it illegal for African Americans to reside in the state. That article was not officially repealed until 1926.)

2 The details about the Housing Authority’s practices come from Dodds, *The College That Would Not Die*, 18–19. My understanding of what happened along the Columbia River in the days preceding the Vanport flood comes from S.E. Rantz and H.C. Riggs, *Floods of May-June 1948 in the Columbia River Basin (Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 1080)* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1949). I am grateful to Caroline Gottschalk Druschke for sharing this document with me, and for helping me think about floods more generally.

3 Dodds, 1.

4 “Portland State University,” Wikimedia Foundation, accessed August 11, 2023, www.wikipedia.org.

5 This preface is indebted to what I have learned from Matt Brim’s *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020) about how to think about queer studies as it is practiced outside the elite centers of the discipline. Although I don’t have the space to unpack these implications here, the terms in which Brim describes the work of “Poor Queer Studies”—as affirmatively “behind the . . . curve” (32), “unfashionable” (32), and “incoheren[t]” (41)—not only dovetail with my experience of PSU but also perfectly fit the texts that I engage in the chapters that follow. Brim’s and my shared interest in the work done at regional universities also offers another way of understanding my project’s interest in regionalism as a category.

6 My interest in this preface is less in the particulars of PSU’s student demographics—which are hardly unusual in the landscape of higher education—than in the interplay between the institution’s history/origins and daily life for contemporary students and teachers therein. I will return to this relationship below. That said, with regard to demographics: In my time at PSU, the average age of an undergraduate was twenty-six, and I taught students ranging in age from sixteen to seventy-eight. My students were far more often returning to college, or continuing an education begun elsewhere, than they were starting their college careers. Statistically, students are as likely to attend PSU temporarily as they are to graduate from the institution. Little about their path through (or to) the university fosters a model of a college education as a straightforward means to an end, or to “self-realization”. This fact can be thought in conversation not only with the Vanport flood but also with PSU’s origin as an extension center for veterans.

7 Dodds, 14, 4.

8 Dodds, 14; the details of what remained after the flood can be found on Dodds, 21.

9 My understanding of Vanport students' response to the flood synthesizes information found in Geiling, "How Oregon's Second Largest City Vanished in a Day"; Dodds, 20–22; and the Vanport papers housed at the Portland State University Library special collections.

10 See Nathan Heller, "The End of the English Major," *New Yorker*, February 27, 2023; Andrew Kay, "Academe's Extinction Event: Failure, Whiskey, and Professional Collapse at the MLA," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 10, 2019; Sheila Liming, "My University is Dying (And soon yours will be, too)," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 2019.

11 I engage PSU here primarily as a specific school, with a unique history, rather than as a type of institution. That said, it also is the kind of school that Brim discusses under the heading of "Poor Queer Studies." If PQS is not "aspirational" (3)—in the sense that it doesn't aspire to the model of institutions at the elite center of the field—then the same can be said for PSU more generally, insofar as it doesn't aspire to do things in the same way as better-resourced universities.

12 I understand these practices to be in keeping with the queer legacy of care in the face of institutional abandonment, a topic to which I will return throughout this project. The institutional abandonment at stake at PSU involves the question of state funding; Oregon is fifth-lowest nationally in resources allotted to higher education.

13 For more on queer kinship at PSU, see Ensor, "Relative Strangers: Contracting Kinship in the Queer Ecology Classroom," *American Literature* 89, no. 2 (2017): 279–304.

14 Let me be very clear: In celebrating PSU in this way, I do not mean to idealize precarity, or in any way excuse the wildly uneven allocation of resources, prestige, and attention across the landscape of higher education. Rather, like Brim, I mean to direct our attention to the affirmatively different practices happening within sites that are too often understood as an inferior approximation of their more elite counterparts. I also want to insist that engaging these sites not only in their periods of acute crisis (when they too readily become "cautionary tales," or "canaries in the coal mine" of higher education) but also in their ongoing, quotidian functioning may offer a way of reorienting paradigms of solidarity—and, consequently, practices of collective action—both within and across institutions.

15 This phrase appears in various places in Sarah Orne Jewett's work, including in her 1892 short story "The Passing of Sister Barsett." See *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels & Stories*, ed. Michael Davitt Bell (New York: Library of America, 1989), 764.

16 In writing this preface, I wrestle with the question of how to ethically position myself relative to a place that I inhabited temporarily and then left. But if queer theory has taught me anything, and if my time in PSU classrooms taught me anything, it's not to underestimate the power of transient relations, and not to too readily identify permanence with significance, or vice versa. And if the works that I engage in the chapters that follow have taught me anything, it's not to underestimate the lingering—and evolving—power of what is nominally "over and done," or what we can learn from "catching up to what is behind [us]." (The first quotation is from the opening sentence of Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* [New York: Random House, 1925], 3; the second is from Elizabeth Freeman's "Still After," in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011], 31.)

Introduction

1 Molly Lynch, *The Forbidden Territory of a Terrifying Woman: A Novel* (New York: Catapult Books, 2023), 21.

2 “Finally,” I say, because environmentalism’s use of the child as metonym for the future not only replicates heterosexist presumptions but also relies on, and reproduces, the ideological alignment of whiteness, innocence, and childhood; this fact begins to index how many of the falsely universalized terms at the heart of environmental thought—including both the future and the child—are themselves fundamentally racialized. As José Esteban Muñoz argues in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), “[t]he future is only the stuff of some kids” (95). A similar claim, recalibrated slightly, appears in Christina Sharpe’s insistence in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) that “[t]he meaning of child, as it abuts Blackness, falls . . . apart” (80, ellipsis original). Environmental rhetoric’s often uncomplicated presumption of childhood innocence thus simultaneously replicates the idea of the child as “always already white” (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 95) and bolsters what Ruha Benjamin, in “Black AfterLives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice” (*Boston Review*, July 16, 2018, www.bostonreview.net), deems “the myth of white innocence.” Further, the child-as-future logic also promises to stabilize the racial status quo via the fundamentally conservative image of futurity that it offers. Such rhetoric implicitly reaches for a future that resembles the present like the biological child resembles the biological parent, thus foreclosing the possibility of radical change. For more on the persistence of the child figure in the environmental movement, see Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). To be clear, I am not suggesting that Lynch’s novel laments the loss of the child-as-future trope; rather, I think the sudden inoperativity of this logic is, in her pages, one indication among many of how the world is shapeshifting.

3 This is text from Dey’s blurb; see Lynch, *Forbidden Territory*, 2023.

4 Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), 27.

5 Canavan’s full statement is “The future has gone bad; we need a new one.” “Preface,” in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), xi. As Richard Tutton makes clear in “The Sociology of Futurelessness” (*Sociology* 57, no. 2 [2023]: 438–453), the feeling that the future is receding is hardly new, and in fact has recurred—becoming something of a through line in critical thought—since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. What feels more specific to our present moment is the frequency with which the critical response involves the work of speculating futures, old and new.

6 A very partial list of such projects includes research initiatives like Yale’s Desert Futures, the University of Cincinnati’s Digital Futures, the University of Colorado-Boulder’s Environmental Futures, the University of Michigan’s Critical Futures, UCSC’s Center for Feminist Futures, and the University of Washington’s Imagining Trans Futures project, and events at Humanities Centers including the University of Oregon Humanities Center’s “Imagining Futures” initiative, the Duke Franklin Humanities Center “Humanities Futures” project, and the UC-Irvine Humanities Center “Introduction to Graduate Futures” program. Talks across the humanities, too, often center on futures; to choose three representative examples, consider Alyssa Battistoni, “Climate Futures and the Future of Work: Rethinking ‘Green Jobs,’ Revaluing Care Work” (University of Texas, November 15, 2021); Harriet Hawkins, “Imagine! Creating Earth Futures” (Stanford Humanities Center, May 2, 2023); Brigitte Fielder, “Early Black Futures: Old Technology, Hopeful Speculation, and Childhood Dreams” (Boston University, March 24, 2022). I will return shortly to the many books focusing on futures.

7 In their introduction to a special issue of *Resilience*, Lousley and O’Brien write: “Political struggles of all sorts are formed and fought over the power to shape ‘the future’—usually the future of a place or a people. Environmentalism has a somewhat different relationship to futurity than other social and political movements, because it is engaged with safeguarding *the future of*

the future in presenting ecological viability as the foundation for all human and more-than-human worlds" (1). Cheryl Lousley and Susie O'Brien, "A History of Environmental Futurity: Special Issue Introduction," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 4, nos. 2–3 (Spring-Fall 2017).

8 For more on trans futures, see (for instance) the essays in the special issue of *TSQ* on "Trans Futures," including micha cárdenas and Jian Neo Chen's coauthored introduction, "Times to Come: Materializing Trans Times," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (November 2019): 472–480; Cyle Metzger, "Chris Vargas's Consciousness Razing: From Forgetting to Futurity," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (February 2020): 99–104; micha cárdenas, "Shifting Futures: Digital Trans of Color Praxis," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 6 (2015), and the work of the *Imagining Trans Futures* Crossdisciplinary Research Cluster at the University of Washington.

9 In "Seizing the Alterity of Futures: Toward a Philosophy of History across Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism," Lou Cornum incisively conceptualizes the adjectives that often preface "futures"—queer, Indigenous, etc.—not simply as indicating identity categories but also, and more importantly, as marking these groups as "collective carriers of temporal traditions against the singular, overdetermined future." *History of the Present* 13, no. 2 (October 2023), 167. Indeed, many liberatory futurisms imagine futurity otherwise not only by imagining alternative futures but also by undoing what Muñoz describes as the "autonaturalizing" force of normative temporality (22), which renders inevitable what Cornum critiques as "the singular, overdetermined future" and what Muñoz critiques as the reproduction of the same.

10 Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," *CR: New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 289. Within our chronopolitical context, to insist upon a future for minoritized groups is, itself, hardly a minor or simple task. For more on the importance of this work, see Renee Hudson, "Imagining the Futures of Latinx Speculative Fiction," *ASAP/Journal* (December 2, 2019, asapjournal.com); Curtis Marez, *Farm Worker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 11; and Mathias Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," *College Literature* 50, nos. 2–3 (Spring-Summer 2023): 432–456.

11 "Settler time" is Mark Rifkin's term; see *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). "Straight time" is Muñoz's.

12 Cornum, "Seizing the Alterity of Futures," 166, 167. Cornum's essay also engages Eshun's work.

13 These italicized "futures" all appear in the titles of recent books in literary criticism that engage speculative works (across various media and periods). I cite them both to indicate the proliferation of "futures" and to indicate the binding of future-thinking and speculative gestures in our contemporary critical imaginary. See Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019); and Ida Yoshinaga, Sean Guynes, and Gerry Canavan, eds., *Uneven Futures: Strategies for Community Survival from Speculative Fiction* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2022).

14 In opening with the proliferation of future-thinking in contemporary thought, I don't mean to ignore the fact that many of these futurisms have a robust history—or that the liberatory project of futurisms is often predicated in part on reactivating the possibilities of the past. However, for my current purposes, I am interested less in the origin stories of these futurisms than in the resurgent interest in them of late.

15 Muñoz, 22.

16 I will discuss these forms of consensus over the pages that follow; for now, we might note that these varied projects leave unquestioned the metonymic gesture that makes thinking "futures" the way to acknowledge crisis and respond to the threat of futurelessness that it entails.

17 I borrow this phrase from Sarah Orne Jewett's 1892 short story "The Passing of Sister Barsett," in *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels & Stories*, ed. Michael Davitt Bell (New York: Library of America, 1989), 764. The phrase also appears elsewhere in Jewett's work.

18 Here I am both citing the lines from Brian Teare that serve as an epigraph to this book and alluding to the Vanport students' nickname for their college, as discussed in the preface.

19 Although the term "queer lasting" is my own, it is less a neologism than a way of heeding the resonances between the queer literatures of the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. Queer lasting allows for a form where Jewett's "at the last" may make contact with (for instance) the 1996 musical *Rent*'s "Thank God this moment's not the last." As that exhale from *Rent*'s "Finale B" suggests, lasting indexes the desire, pain, fear, and relief of life lived near the end, embodying its affective textures, its forms of care and action, its shapes of possibility and foreclosure. My project is to follow the contours and textures of queer lasting as they emerge and recede in the literatures that I read, and in the lives that they reflect.

20 By "grammar," I mean both structures of speech and, true to the etymology of the word, attention to the "letter" (*gramma*) of texts, including critical ones. That is to say, my method in what follows engages specific lines and phrases within critical texts with a habit of attention customarily brought to lines of poetry, and mobilizes the unexpected shapes of thought that emerge as a result.

21 This is Robert Spiller's account in his 1946 *Literary History of the United States*. Cited in Caroline Gebhard, "The Spinster in the House of American Criticism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 84.

22 The division between speculative and realist genres is, of course, hardly absolute. For one account of the relationship between speculation and realism in Indigenous futurisms, see Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," 453.

23 Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau: A Biography* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 456.

24 The latter quote is drawn from their engagement with Libby Robin, Sverker Sölin, and Paul Warde's book *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

25 India Bourke, "David Wallace-Wells: the writer forcing us to confront the climate apocalypse," *New Statesman* (March 6, 2019, emphasis mine).

26 Daniel Sherrell, *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of Our World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 99.

27 Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman, "Life After People: Science Faction and Ecological Futures," *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, ed. Gerry Canavan (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 192 (emphasis mine).

28 Rebecca Evans, "Fantastic Futures?: Cli-Fi, Climate Justice, and Queer Futurity," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 4, no. 2–3 (Spring-Fall 2017): 94.

29 Lisa Garforth, "Environmental Futures, Now and Then: Crisis, Systems Modeling, and Speculative Fiction," *Osiris* 34, no. 1 (2019). For alternatives to the extrapolative model of science fiction (and the linear temporality it implies), see Grace Dillon's work on Indigenous Futurisms, especially her account of the temporal "spiral." Grace Dillon and Pedro Neves Marques, "Taking the Fiction Out of Science Fiction: A Conversation about Indigenous Futurisms," *e-flux Journal* no. 120 (September 2021).

30 These two modes of futurity, unsurprisingly, also take different approaches to the question of the "end of the world." The sustainability/mainstream environmentalism model, in keeping with normative definitions of vitality, seeks to prevent it at all costs. Liberatory scholarship often seeks to precipitate an end, in part as a way of rupturing the extant structures that already have been responsible for many worlds ended, and many ongoing apocalypses.

31 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to detail all the many ways in which critics have complicated the normative models of futurity in mainstream environmentalism—including the rhetoric of child-as-future with which I began—over the past fifteen years or so. This was the focus of much early work in queer ecocriticism, including my own.

32 Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 180.

33 Dianne Chisholm, "Biophilia, Creative Involution, and the Ecological Future of Queer Desire," *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 361; Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff, "Queer Fire: Ecology, Combustion and Pyrosexual Desire," *feminist review* 118 (2018): 9; Catriona Sandilands, "Queer Life?: Ecocriticism After the Fire," *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 310.

34 Sabine LeBel, "Lesbian Processing at the End of the World: Lesbian Identity and Queer Environmental Futurity," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2022): 160; Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Aftermath: Two Queer Artists Respond to Nuclear Spaces," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, ed. Emily Eliza Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 89 (emphasis mine). Bryan-Wilson is explicitly interested in "how we imagine alternative futures" (79).

35 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Foreword," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), xii; and Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 138.

36 Hil Malatino, "Future Fatigue: Trans Intimacies and Trans Presents (or How to Survive the Interregnum)," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (2019): 635–658.

37 See Michael Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Benjamin Bateman, *The Modernist Art of Queer Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

38 This is not to deny the existence of queer/trans parents, or to understate the extent to which lesbian mothering, for instance, has been an important part of the work of Black feminism and other forms of minoritarian political praxis. For more on the relationship between queer parenting and radical worldmaking, see Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016) and Julietta Singh, *The Breaks: An Essay* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2021). See also Brim's remarkable chapter on "Poor Queer Studies Mothers" in *Poor Queer Studies*.

39 For more on queer reproduction and replication, see my Chapter 3 and Valerie Rohy, "On Homosexual Reproduction," *differences* 23, no. 1 (2012): 101–130. Like Bateman, I am interested in how "this novel species, unfit for the procreative imperatives of normative personhood, might survive and imagine its survival differently." (4)

40 Lothian, *Old Futures*, 5; Neel Ahuja, "Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (June 2015): 365.

41 Jessica Hurley, *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 4; Rebecca S. Oh, "Apocalyptic Realism: 'A New Category of the Event,'" *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 971.

42 As is the case in Hurley's and Oh's accounts of lived apocalypse, the perceived futurelessness of queer life grounds homophobic violence and institutional abandonment, a topic to which I will return throughout this project. My point here is not to sideline that fact, but rather to attend to how the constitutive, affirmative nature of queer futurelessness also affects responses to such threats.

43 I don't mean to collapse the differences between Hurley and Oh. Hurley is, in a manner more in keeping with my own approach, interested in a "radical afuturity" (22) that does not seek to convert action into new futures. However, both Hurley's introduction and Oh's article culminate in "futures." Hurley's are "impossible," indexing the importance of futures (or liberatory possibilities) that we cannot conceive but work toward anyway (32). Oh's are twinned, embodying the "antinomies" of her titular genre: "apocalyptic realism shows us two futures that cannot be separated. Living cannot go on, living will go on" (982). Relatedly, the texts that Hurley reads still retain a gravitational attraction to futures, if often in the form of transitive negation. I will return to this aspect of her approach below. The texts I read here, by contrast, are *affirmatively disinterested* in the future(s) as such.

44 It is important, too, that terminality and extinction, the registers that interest me, are more "minor forms" of worldending (Oh 971) than the apocalyptic register that animates Hurley's and Oh's work. I will return to this distinction in Chapter 3.

45 Queer lasting, unlike Hurley's "apocalypse as radical afuturity," is not a "targeted intervention" (22), precisely because it is not oriented toward "a future" as something to be rejected or embraced.

46 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

47 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For more on Love's and Edelman's futural grammars, see my "Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Nonreproductive Futurity," *American Literature* 84 no. 2 (June 2012): 409–435.

48 Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 62.

49 Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 7.

50 Kate Thomas, "Post Sex: On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon," in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

51 Elizabeth Freeman, "Still After," in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

52 Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Love, *Feeling Backward*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 149.

53 Bateman, *Modernist Art*; Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Freeman, *Beside You in Time: Sense Methods and Queer Sociabilities in the American Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

54 This indeterminate dilation—also intrinsic to "lasting"—is the structural inverse of the transitive logics that attend the future-as-object.

55 There are exceptions to this, including Kate Thomas's work on the prepositional quality of queer.

56 Melvin Dixon, "I'll Be Somewhere Listening For My Name," *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (2000): 81.

57 Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 30.

58 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 40–41.

59 Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 17. For a more sustained elaboration of subjunctive possibility, see my argument in Chapter 2.

60 I use the language of "extinction" here in part to nod to the way in which language loss is often discussed in registers that interest me in this project; however, within Indigenous studies, there is disagreement about the adequacy of this term.

61 A broader question here involves how we make legible in English the mutual imbrication of different temporal moments. We have evocative images for the recursions of time—consider Ralph Ellison's famous account in *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952) of the "boomerang[ing]" of time (5) or Kyle Powys Whyte's articulation of "spiraling time" within Indigenous narrative-making, "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises," *Nature and Space* 1, nos 1–2 (2018): 228–229. Yet when we transpose these logics from synchronic images into diachronic narratives, language often begins to fail us, our accounts faltering as we retain "past," "present," and "future" as discrete terms. We ask after "the history of the imagined future," the "dense futurities of the present and the past," and "the simultaneity of the past and present," seemingly confounding the complexity of time in the process of telling it. These formulations, reliant as they are on bounded nouns (not only "past," "present," and "future," but also "history," "futurities," and "simultaneity"), syntactically contain the dynamism that they seek to theorize. (The first two quotations here are from Lothian, *Old Futures*, 2. The third is a fairly common phrase in theories of temporality; see, for instance, Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* [London: Bloomsbury, 2012].)

62 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 53.

63 According to Kimmerer, seventy percent of Potawatomi words are verbs (in contrast to English, where only thirty percent are).

64 Such verbal morphologies shape relationships to not only land/ecology—as Kimmerer's work makes evident—but also sex(uality). In "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family," in *Making Kin Not Population*, eds. Adele E. Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018), Kim TallBear demonstrates how English makes us think of sexuality and sex as "things," whereas Indigenous cosmologies understand them as sets of relations (161). David Shorter calls this "objectivating the intersubjective" (as cited in TallBear, 159).

65 Joshua Whitehead, *Making Love with the Land* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 128–129 (emphasis mine).

66 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–1791.

67 Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81.

68 It is in part because of this desire to resolve reading into political action that Nicole Seymour describes much ecocriticism as "instrumental." See *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence*

in the Ecological Age (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 26–28.

69 Gregg Crane, "Criticism Against Itself," *American Literary History* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 216.

70 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Guest Column: What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?," *PMLA* 110, no. 3 (May 1995): 344; Freeman, "Still After," 30.

71 Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 41.

72 Teagan Bradway, "Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form," *PMLA* 136, no. 5 (October 2021): 712.

73 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xiii.

74 Here I refer implicitly to Muñoz's argument in *Cruising Utopia*.

75 Freeman, "Still After," 30.

76 Nicholas Tyler Reich, "Truck Sluts, Petrosexual Countrysides, and Trashy Environmentalisms," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (2022): 65–83; Hannah Boast, "Theorizing the Gay Frog," *Environmental Humanities* 14, no. 3 (2022): 661–679; Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism* (the discussion of *Green Porno* is in chapter 2); Seymour, "The Greenhouse in the Bathhouse: Ecosexuals, 'Plant Daddies,' and Queer Spatial Design" (talk at University of California at Berkeley, October 23, 2020).

77 Exceptions to this rule include some key early texts in queer ecologies. See, for instance, Robert Azzarello, *Queer Environmentality: Ecology, Evolution, and Sexuality in American Literature* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012) and Catriona Sandilands, "The Importance of Reading Queerly: Jewett's *Deephaven* as Feminist Ecology," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 57–77.

78 There are certainly exceptions to this as well, such as the work of scholars in ecopoetics and essays in the collections *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, eds. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017) and *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, eds. Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

79 Margaret Ronda, *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 8.

80 Fawaz, *Queer Forms*, 49; Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017): 229; Freeman, "Still After," 29.

81 Freeman, "Still After," 30.

82 When ecopoet Brian Teare writes—to refer again to my epigraph—that "we live without a future—that's what queer and now," his implicit echo of Sedgwick's 1993 essay "Queer and Now" (which opens with the suicides of queer youth, and the lost futures that result) indexes the important fact that what is queer and now is often also what was queer and then.

83 For instance, we might predicate our understanding of the field on a legacy of thought that, rather than trying to conjure futurity, instead engages the complexities of persisting. Consider caffyn kelly's essay "Queer/Nature (Be Like Water)" in the 1994 "queer nature" issue of *UnderCurrents*, a set of writings considered one origin point for the field (*UnderCurrents: Journal of Critical Environmental Studies* 6 [1994]). After opening with a meditation on the ubiquity of queer death and the fragility of queer survival, kelly reflects on the relationship between human and riverine bodies: "I think homosexuality is like a river. At all times, in all conditions, we persist in our loving. . . ." As the piece continues, a single line recurs: "we persist in our loving." This persisting lasts all the way into Cleo Wölfle Hazard's *Underflows: Queer Trans Ecologies and River Justice* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022), which engages the fact that "[t]o wait, to persist without any assurance of survival, to act with care in the face of hopeless hopefulness, this is the

shared situation of ACT UP, Black Lives Matter, Water Protectors, and border activists, who share traits of persistence and generosity with salmon" (100). Indeed, when read together, *UnderCurrents* and *Underflows* map the "wounded yet uncannily persistent waters" (Hazard 177) of a field—or a watershed—that not only already knows how to set its sights somewhere other than "futures," but also models this alternate temporality in the form of its own recursions. For Hazard's riverine work doesn't cite kelly but indexes how her ideas last. *Queer Lasting* attempts to amplify Hazard's sense that "persistence in the face of . . . slow violence" is "a feature of queer ecologies" (175), tracing the shapes that persistence takes across queer literature, and the grammars in which it becomes legible therein.

84 I borrow this language of "dead" texts from Lida Maxwell's reading of Rachel Carson: "despite the book's political impact, most thinkers writing today treat *Silent Spring* as a dead text; in achieving its purpose, it exhausted itself." "Queer/Love/Bird Extinction: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as a Work of Love," *Political Theory* 45, no. 5 (October 2017): 694.

85 Ramzi Fawaz, "Stripped to the Bone: Sequencing Queerness in the Comic Strip Work of Joe Brainard and David Wojnarowicz," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 2017): 341; Dana Seitler, "Queer(s) Reading/*How Can It Be Wrong (When It Feels So Right)?*," (*ASAP/Journal*, May 31, 2021, asapjournal.com); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 146. Seitler is quoting Ariella Azoulay's account of potential history, to which I will return in Chapter 2.

86 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 32.

87 I often say—only half facetiously—that I am an ecocritic who doesn't write about nature and a queer theorist who doesn't write about sex. This reveals not only my tendency to engage texts that dwell obliquely to familiar environmental settings and familiar queer relational paradigms, but also my relative disinterest in *nouns*. Not coincidentally, most of the grammars of persistence that I trace in this project involve modifications to verbal forms. We might note that truck sluts, gay frogs, green porno, and plant daddies all involve the same grammatical structure—an adjective/noun pairing where one piece of the equation is recognizably "eco" and one is recognizably "queer."

88 For examples of this bidirectional approach, see Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Lavender's Green?: Some Thoughts on Queer(y)ing Environmental Politics," *UnderCurrents* 6 (1994): 20–24; and Greg Garrard, "How Queer is Green?," *Configurations* 18, nos. 1–2 (Winter 2010): 73–96.

89 Timothy Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 281.

90 In *American Women Regionalists: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), Judith Fetterley & Marjorie Pryse periodize regionalism as lasting from 1850–1910; Chapter 2 will take up this periodization explicitly.

91 Love, *Feeling Backward*, 8.

92 Regionalism is closely related to—though not identical with—local color, a term that will occasionally appear in critics' accounts of the texts in this project. For more on the relationship between the two modes, see Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

93 Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris," in *Obscure Destinies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), also cited in Fetterley and Pryse, 1995.

94 When events do propel the story, it is often in the interest of maintaining continuity or privileging sameness. Rose Terry Cooke's "How Celia Changed Her Mind" and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "A New England Nun" both depict women deciding not to marry.

95 Here I am gesturing toward the fact that socioeconomic and cultural shifts threatened the viability both of the communities depicted in regionalism and of the genre itself. I will return to these two forms of (non)survival – on their own terms and in relation to each other – at various points in the chapters that follow.

96 Warner Berthoff, "The Art of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*," *The New England Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1959): 51.

97 Valerie Rohy, *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52.

98 Alexander Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: American Book Company, 1951), as cited in Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others*, 53.

99 Ann Douglas Wood, "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America, 1865–1914," *Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (1972).

100 Cather, preface to *Not Under Forty*, in *Willa Cather: Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 812. While Cather here is referring to events at a world-historical scale, Fetterley and Pryse invoke the same phrase to describe Cather's reaction to the marriage of Isabelle McClung, the companion of her young adulthood: "Isabelle's marriage in 1916 to Jan Hambourg marked the point at which Cather's personal life broke in two" (*American Women Regionalists*, 594).

101 Here, I hear Damon Young and Joshua Weiner's words: "It was queer not as in the deconstruction of identity, but rather, we might say, before the disaster of identity had occurred." "Introduction: Queer Bonds," *GLQ* 17, nos. 2–3 (2011): 227.

102 Vinciane Despret, "Afterword: It is an Entire World That Has Disappeared," in *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*, eds. Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 218.

103 Here I implicitly invoke Thom van Dooren's argument in *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), to which I will return repeatedly throughout this project.

104 Melvin Dixon, "One By One," *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (2000): 75–76.

105 In tracing the consolidation of sexuality as it unfolded complexly "across a long and unsettled passage in American history," Coviello insists that the birth of this species "*was a movement*, a slowly unfolding process, rather than an event, however decisively the massive publicity of the Wilde trials may have circulated and solidified that emergence" (14, emphasis mine). In this subordinating of discrete event to slow unfurling, Coviello's approach to the extinguishing of erotic possibility structurally echoes van Dooren's approach to species extinction in *Flight Ways.*

106 See *Feeling Backward*, especially 93–99, for a discussion of continuity in regionalist texts by Jewett and Cather.

107 Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 14.

108 I refer here to the publication date of the novel, not its setting.

109 Rohy, *Lost Causes*, 55.

110 Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, 4.

111 E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, "Introduction: Becoming Unbecoming: Untimely Meditations," in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, eds. McCallum and Tuhkanen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 9.

112 *Queer Lasting* is more or less split along gender lines: the first half, which focuses on regionalism, reads works by authors who have been understood as female (even as some scholars —notably K. Allison Hammer—have pondered the possibility of reading Cather as trans), while

my engagement with AIDS literature focuses primarily on works by gay male authors. I risk the perception that I am reifying an understanding of regionalism as "female" and AIDS writing as "male" precisely to foreground the surprising account of literary history that results from retaining these emphases. While I am also interested in resonances between paradigms of care in regionalism and the work of lesbian caretakers during AIDS (a topic I engage in Chapter 1), I am most committed to demonstrating links between the work of female regionalist writers and their male AIDS-era counterparts. I do this not only to challenge received understandings of queer literary history but also to suggest another way to (re)read both AIDS literature and regionalism.

As Katie Hogan demonstrates in *Women Take Care: Gender, Race, and the Culture of AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), "literary and visual responses to the pandemic" often reify the 'good woman' figure" (xi). The problematic image of "chaste . . . women [who] infuse respectability and female compassion into an otherwise shame-ridden and frightening discourse" (3) is, for Hogan, exemplified by the character of Bessie in the film *Marvin's Room*, who—in the words of one reviewer—is "a radiant 'devoted spinster' and 'old maid'" (15). By demonstrating the unexpected resonances between, for instance, Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*—populated almost entirely by spinsters and old maids—and Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*—populated by unabashed depictions of gay sex—I seek to suggest the surprising spinsterliness present within gay men's writing and the underacknowledged queer eroticism and care ethics present within regionalism. To read these traditions together is thus to trace what Sedgwick would deem the "interdigitation" of modes so often defined against one another, and also to challenge the notion that spinsterliness—whether in white women's regionalist writing or depictions of AIDS—ultimately serves primarily to consolidate existing forms of power, or to neutralize the threat, presence, and power of difference.

113 Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), 179.

114 Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (New York: Random House, 1925), 258; Cather, "Preface," in *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), xix.

115 Gillian Friedman, "Utah's AIDS crisis, then and now: From one doctor in the 1980s to the U's new free clinic," *Deseret News*, January 29, 2018, www.deseret.com.

1. Terminal Regions

1 Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), 179.

2 See Nature Conservancy principles at www.nature.org; Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson, eds., *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis* (New York: One World, 2021).

3 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

4 It is possible to imagine a project of "saving" involving such a posture (where failure is understood as immanent to the work), but that is not how I understand any of the projects cited here to be functioning.

5 There is much to say about queer theory's complex posture toward questions of longevity. For the purposes of the present chapter, I am most compelled by this reflection in E. Patrick Johnson's foreword to Scott Herring and Lee Wallace's *Long Term: Essays on Queer Commitment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021): "[D]eath is a queer phenomenon: a thing to which one must commit because it has committed itself to us. . . ." (vii).

6 Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene," *New York Times* (November 10, 2013).

7 Scranton attaches the pronouns “we” and “us” somewhat amorphously to both “humanity” and members of “this civilization,” while not addressing communities’ differential exposure to the dangers and deaths he invokes, or their differential access to the “survival” he engages. I mean my own plural pronouns in this chapter to rhetorically index my book’s aspiration to collectivizing work that is predicated on avowing and inhabiting difference, rather than in any way to flatten that difference. I will return to this topic throughout the chapters that follow.

8 Indeed, to be “already dead” seems to preclude the work of learning how to die.

9 Teagan Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 221; Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 7.

10 Scranton’s possessive individualism recalls my discussion of the “white possessive” (and its grammars) in the introduction. I will return to the politics of self-possession not only later in this chapter, but also in Chapters 2 and 4. For another example of thinking Sedgwick and Scranton together, see Daniel Sherrell, *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of Our World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 238–239.

11 See Nathaniel Rich’s *Losing Earth: A Recent History* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019).

12 See David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019).

13 Jill Casid, “Handle With Care,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56 no. 4 (Winter 2012): 125.

14 Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 46.

15 Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 184.

16 If it may be going too far to group Sedgwick with the other “outmoded” authors that populate this project, it does seem that her work is increasingly deemed “exhausted.” Consider Andrea Long Chu’s review of Maggie Nelson’s *On Freedom* (*Vulture*, September 7, 2021), which critiques Nelson’s work in part by critiquing its investment in Sedgwick: “Take the book’s thesis, drawn directly from the work of Sedgwick, whose famous essay ‘Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading’ proposed that academic critics should soften the defensive urge to pin their objects down in favor of a slower, open-minded willingness to ‘confer plenitude’ on them. I have read, and this is not exaggerating, some 40 or 50 accounts of what Sedgwick meant by paranoid and reparative reading; *it is, within queer theory, a forest fully logged*.” I am, here, less interested in Chu’s breezy caricature of Sedgwick’s argument than in her ecological metaphor for critics’ attraction to it. Why might we return to “a forest fully logged”? Perhaps for many of the same reasons that we might make friends with the terminally ill. For more on the homologies between clear-cut forests and AIDS care, see Jan Zita Grover’s *North Enough: AIDS and Other Clear-Cuts* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1997).

17 Here I again refer to Coviello’s description of regionalism.

18 Here we might hear evocations of McKibben’s “remnants” and Margaret Ronda’s “remainders.” See Ronda, Remainders: American Poetry at Nature’s End (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

19 I have decided to deem Sedgwick’s writings composed after her breast cancer diagnosis (1990) her “late” work, a word that I invoke in part to index the meeting of “middle age” and “late in life.”

20 Sedgwick, “Thinking Through Queer Theory,” in *The Weather in Proust*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 191 (emphasis mine). The talk was originally

delivered at Ochanomizu University in Tokyo on October 7, 2000.

21 This formulation may risk recapitulating the normative logic of "future generations," which itself demands that we act on behalf of futures we will not live to see. However, that logic is, as many have demonstrated, often predicated on a desire for immortality (via intergenerational life); Sedgwick's account differs insofar as it predicates action and continuity on a reckoning with mortality. One's own futurelessness, in other words, does not seek to be redeemed by others' futures.

22 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "White Glasses," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 255.

23 Likewise, DeSilvey asks after "endings that are actually beginnings, and beginnings that resemble endings" (*Curated Decay*, 155), while Jewett's *Pointed Firs* begins after an end, insofar as its first chapter narrativizes—and is named—"The Return."

24 I don't mean my account of "newness" and possibility to diminish in any way the pain involved in the terminal condition; rather, I am following Sedgwick's lead in considering the impact of terminality on practices of thinking and reading; in "White Glasses," she reflects on how "in many ways it is full of stimulation and interest, even, to be ill and writing" (*Tendencies*, 256), a sentiment that—along with the pain—deepened as her illness progressed.

25 In discussing the need to inhabit the middle ranges of agency, Sedgwick reflects that the hypostasizing of "hegemonic" and "subversive" involves "the same unhelpful structure that used to undergird historical arguments about whether a given period was one of 'continuity' or 'change.'" Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 13 (hereafter cited in text as *TF*).

26 Or, perhaps, in the middle. In keeping with the temporal deroutinizing that illness often produces, the fact that Sedgwick's "middle age" would prove to be the end of her life also yielded its inverse. Living at the end attuned her to the dimensionality of various middles.

27 I don't mean to suggest here that they died at the same time, but rather that they maintained and deepened their queer intimacy amidst terminality.

28 A similar process of dilation emerges when, in her "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" essay, Sedgwick lets reified "knowledge" dilate into an "ecology of knowing" (145) and, throughout her late work, lets the bounded horizon of "death" dilate into a relational, ongoing practice of "dying." Both of these paradigms are reminiscent of the dilation at stake in my project, which lets the fact of lastness dilate into the ongoing practice of lasting. See Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," (*TF*).

29 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 3.

30 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Pedagogy of Buddhism" (*TF* 174–175).

31 Teagan Bradway, "'Permeable We!': Affect and the Ethics of Intersubjectivity in Eve Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love*," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013), 100.

32 Rebecca Brown, *The Gifts of the Body* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 28. Brown's book also features an AIDS caretaker who deems herself "a friend" (88) to protect the privacy of the man with whom she works.

33 Importantly, change in these settings is located less in verbs than in adverbs and in prepositions. Such modifications are no less profound for being more "minor" in character.

34 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.

35 In the introduction to *TF*, Sedgwick writes that "the most salient preposition in [the book] is probably beside. Invoking a Deleuzian interest in planar relations, the irreducibly spatial positionality of beside seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which beneath and beyond turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos" (8).

36 Warner Berthoff, "The Art of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*," *The New England Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1959): 51.

37 Ann Douglas Wood, "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America, 1865–1914," *Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (1972): 28.

38 Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 151.

39 Brodhead refers to South Berwick, Jewett's hometown, but takes its history as a surrogate for the (fictionalized) Maine communities in which Jewett sets most of her work.

40 Donna Campbell, *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885–1915* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 7–8.

41 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*, ed. Marjorie Pryse (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 24, 25, 26.

42 Sedgwick, "Reality and Realization," *The Weather in Proust*, 214.

43 Nir Evron, "'Fog-Shaped Men': The Remnant Figure in Postbellum American Regionalism," *Genre* 52, no. 3 (2019): 180.

44 This line appears in Spiller's 1946 book *Literary History of the United States*. Cited in Caroline Gebhard, "The Spinster in the House of American Criticism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 84.

45 Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 218.

46 The subtle modifications "off" and "up" and out" recall both the adverbial modifications involved in terminal care and Sedgwick's prepositions in "Pedagogy of Buddhism" (*TF*). Likewise, Jewett's queer shift to an intransitive watch anticipates how Sedgwick's work renders reading and befriending gently intransitive.

47 This discussion will return in Chapter 4, when I link the stony and often anonymous relations of Dunnet Landing to the forms of impersonal intimacy that characterize late-twentieth-century accounts of urban cruising.

48 Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 20.

49 "Perennial" was also slang for a certain rhythm of AIDS caretaking: "Perennials were people who worked for UCS for a while, then did something else, then came back for a while, then did something else, back and forth." Brown, *The Gifts of the Body*, 146.

50 Wood, "Literature of Impoverishment," 32. The demeaning of "rotting timbers" also links back to DeSilvey's attention to material ruination.

51 Many of these same critiques have been made of the reparative gesture itself. See especially Patricia Steulke, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

52 E.E. Demore, "A Palliative Approach to the End of the World: What if we accept that we'll never solve climate change?" (*Medium.com*, April 25, 2019).

53 Guy McPherson, *Only Love Remains: Dancing at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Woodthrush Productions, 2019), np.

54 One of the first articles to be written about the movement—N.R. Kleinfield's "In Death Watch for a Stranger, Becoming a Friend to the End" (*New York Times*, January 25, 2004)—described a doula as a terminally ill man's "last friend on earth"; that *ethos* of befriending pervades the movement.

55 What Would an HIV Doula Do? Collective, mission statement, www.hivdoula.work. See website and https://www.tedkerr.club/organizing for more information about the collective.

56 Abdul-Aliy A. Muhammad and Pato Hebert, "Introduction: What Does an Uprising Doula Do?" in *What Does an Uprising Doula Do?*, eds. Muhammad and Hebert, www.onearchives.org. All of the quotations in this paragraph are from this introduction, except for "someone in community," which is from the mission statement of the What Would an HIV Doula Do? collective, as cited earlier.

57 What Would an HIV Doula Do? Collective, *What Would an HIV Doula Do?: The First Conversation*, Spring 2015, www.hivdoula.work, 11.

58 For a powerful account of palliative care as part of "holistically intergenerational climate justice," see Julia D. Gibson's "Practicing Palliation for Extinction and Climate Change: Weaving Death Ethics from Story and Practice," *Environmental Humanities* 15 no. 1 (March 2023).

59 Ted Kerr, "What Does a Doula Do?" in *What Does a COVID-19 Doula Do?*, What Would an HIV Doula Do? Collective, zine, www.oneinstitute.org, 9.

60 Alexandra Juhasz, "Doula Directives, Routes to Uprising" in *What Does an Uprising Doula Do?*, eds. Abdul-Aliy A. Muhammad and Pato Hebert.

61 The return to "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" also helps with the question of scale. As Sedgwick insists, "if the paranoid or the depressive position operate on a smaller scale than the level of individual typology [since they are positions and practices, not identities], they also operate on a larger: that of shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse" (*TF* 150).

2. Grammars of the Unrealized

1 Nathaniel Rich, "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change," *New York Times*, August 4, 2018.

2 This is, of course, also the period when AIDS emerged as an epidemiological and sociopolitical crisis in the United States.

3 Ivana Kottasová, Swati Gupta, and Helen Regan, "The One Chance We Have: The pandemic gave the world a golden opportunity to fix the climate crisis. We're about to waste it," *CNN* Edition, September 2020, www.cnn.com.

4 Justin Worland, "Did We Just Blow Our Last, Best Chance to Tackle Climate Change?," *TIME*, December 30, 2021, www.time.com.

5 Matt Simon, "2021 Was a Huge Missed Opportunity on Climate Action," *WIRED*, December 27, 2021, www.wired.com.

6 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 3–4.

7 I borrow this phrase from the title of Alexis Lothian's 2018 book.

8 For another take on this term, see Valerie Rohy's analysis of queer etiology in *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

9 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 174.

10 Ariella Azoulay, “Potential History: Thinking Through Violence,” *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 553.

11 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

12 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 146.

13 Andrew Miller, “Lives Unled in Realist Fiction,” *Representations* 98, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 120.

14 Andrew H. Miller, *On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of Our Unled Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), xvii. The Wilde quotation is the epigraph to the article and appears on p.1 of the book.

15 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

16 Miller, *On Not Being Someone Else*, xiii.

17 Scott Herring, “Catherian Friendship; or, How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52 no. 1 (Spring 2006): 84; Azoulay, “Potential History,” 572.

18 Michael Leddy, “‘Distant and Correct’: The Double Life of *The Professor’s House*,” *Cather Studies* 3 (1996), np. This formulation also evokes Freeman’s idea of temporal drag, as developed in *Time Binds*.

19 Here I again invoke Peter Coviello.

20 Michelle Nijhuis, “What Do You Call the Last of a Species?,” *New Yorker*, March 2, 2017.

21 Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *American Women Regionalists: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 594.

22 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

23 Willa Cather, “Preface,” in *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), ix, x, x, xix.

24 Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, eds., *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2013), 375.

25 Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 3.

26 The fact that Cather’s text begins by proclaiming that the “moving [is] over and done” recalls not only the crossing of beginnings and endings discussed in Chapter 1 but also Jessica Hurley’s insistence on treating “futurelessness as a starting point for thought rather than its end.”

27 Doris Grumbach, “Foreword” to *O Pioneers!* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), xxvii.

28 If, as Herring suggests, “[Cather’s] friendly male-male relations . . . challenge readers to imagine spaces that surpass the artifices of a visible subculture (homosexuality) and dominant culture itself (heterosexuality)” (69), I argue that among such “spaces” are the grammatical structures that make conceptually inhabitable what the world itself cannot.

29 Grumbach’s articulation of “the deep sadness of a love that has passed away without ever being realized,” referring to Godfrey’s relationship to Tom Outland, also applies to Godfrey’s relationship to his boyhood self.

30 These two “unrealized”s are inseparable, since what precludes the persistence of homosocial intimacies as primary attachments in the novel—the fact that they do not lead to identitarian paradigms (or don’t resolve into the sanctioned role of “lover”)—is also the source of their power.

31 Sam Bakkila, “Problematizing the Pluperfect, Conjugating the Counterfactual: Willa Cather’s Latin Grammar” (2016, unpublished). As a Portland State M.A. student in my “Willa Cather and Reading Queerly” course, Bakkila produced one of the most brilliant readings of Cather I have

ever encountered, taking our class discussions of grammar (especially in the "conjugating the verb 'to love'" passage) in original directions via his knowledge of Latin. Engaging Latin's relative tenses, relationship to active and passive voice, and extensive use of the subjunctive mood, Bakkila demonstrates how the language indexes the complex queer temporality of Godfrey's homosocial bonds. Imagining the conjugation practice of a student, he writes: "Latin has a more detailed and prescribed system for conjugation that includes highly particular rules for tense that we do not have in English, or that are accomplished in English by helping verbs or other time markers, so conjugating in Latin implies a richer set of temporalities." Later, in a reading of the many subjunctives involved in Jim Burden's relationship with Ántonia Shimerda in *My Ántonia*, he traces "the slipperiness of the division between the subjunctive and the indicative" in Cather's Latinate cosmology, arguing that "[its] faith in the underlying reality of the subjunctive is one of the reasons why *My Ántonia* is one of Cather's happiest works." It is perhaps fitting that in a chapter on *The Professor's House*, I find myself returning to the unpublished writing of my own former student, someone from whom I continue to learn, even across the distances that now separate us. Although I am citing Bakkila in this chapter, I should also mention that after he returned my attention to the role of Latin in *The Professor's House*, I began thinking anew about the role of Latin in the AIDS literature that interests me; the argument of Chapter 3 would not be the same without the inspiration of his thought.

32 Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 363.

33 In Bakkila's words: "Latin has a more robust and systematic grammar for expressing the subjunctive, or the things that could have been."

34 Jude Jacques, *Latin for American Schools: Deo et Patriae* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2016), np.

35 Some grammarians consider the infinitive a mood, along with the indicative, the subjunctive, and the imperative. Others exclude it from that category, since it is not inflected.

36 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Willa Cather and Others," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 172. "Turquoise set in dull silver" appears twice in *The Professor's House*: in the epigraph, and on 90. The presence of the local color sketch at the center of the novel also indexes the energy of the past—not only does it embody an earlier literary mode, but it also was the first portion of the novel that Cather composed.

37 This, interestingly, is the same question that Heather Love, via Lillian, asks of Tom Outland—is he a who or a what (84)? We might also ask whether the former selves who persist within us are living, dead, or something provocatively in between.

38 Cited in Joan Acocella, "Cather and the Academy," *New Yorker*, November 27, 1995, 62.

39 "Lost to sight" is the final phrase of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. I will return to this line in Chapter 3.

40 For more on the relationship between the nuclear family formation and colonial violence, see Kim TallBear, "Making Love and Relations," in *Making Kin Not Population*, eds. Adele E. Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018); and Richard Phillips, "Settler colonialism and the nuclear family," *Canadian Geographies* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 239–253.

41 In his claiming of Indigenous "ancestors," a topic to which I will return, Tom can be read as participating in the tradition of white Americans "playing Indian," in Philip J. Deloria's phrase. See Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

42 Carolyn Dekker, "Willa Cather's Southwestern Grave Robbers," *Western American Literature* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 429.

43 Survivance is Gerald Vizenor's term, a portmanteau of "survival" and "resistance"; as he writes in *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University

of Nebraska Press, 1998), "survivance . . . is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence" (15).

44 The logic of the "unrealized" also has purchase in Indigenous studies. See, for instance, Daniel Heath Justice's consideration, in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), of "the crushing weight of possibility unrealized, of what might have been, had we not lost so many members of our families and our nations" (115).

45 Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 37.

46 In "Losing the Whole in the Parts: Identity in *The Professor's House*," *Arizona Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2008), Stuart Burrows levels a similar critique of Michaels.

47 Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 8, 10.

48 I am arguing that Cather offers less *new terms* than *new grammars* for historical narration and historiographical practice.

49 Willa Cather, "The Novel Démeublé," *New Republic* 30, no. 384, April 12, 1922.

50 Jonathan Goldberg, *Willa Cather and Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), ix.

51 I am grateful to Katyanna Guthrie, my undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, who first offered this brilliant reading of Augusta as the boyhood Godfrey grown up.

52 D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 28.

53 Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 112.

54 James D. Hart, "The Professor's House," in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 535.

55 For more on affirmative enoughness, see my "Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Nonreproductive Futurity," *American Literature* 84, no. 2 (June 2012): 409–435.

56 The essay begins: "The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished."

57 By meditating on the grown Godfrey's relationship to the boy within, this scene also indexes the queer intergenerationality internal to a lifespan.

58 *re-*, prefix, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, etymonline.com.

3. Queer Unliving

1 Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 258.

2 This is not to deny either the extent to which intent can be involved in the *causes* of extinction, or the links between extinction and genocidal extermination events, but rather to suggest that the scale of mass extinction complicates any direct relationship between cause and effect.

3 Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 5.

4 Richard Grusin, ed., *After Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018). Monographs about extinction in literary studies/the environmental humanities include Joshua Schuster's *What is Extinction?: A Natural and Cultural History of Last Animals* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2023), Ursula Heise's *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), Ashley Dawson's *Extinction:*

A Radical History (New York: OR Books, 2016), and Thom van Dooren's *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

5 I hesitate to provide specific citations for this discrepancy, as they inevitably will change between the time of my writing and the time of this book's publication.

6 In *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019), David Wallace-Wells reminds us that in fact "all but the [mass extinction] that killed the dinosaurs involved climate change produced by greenhouse gas" (3).

7 Human beings are thus both the endangered and the endangering. I put "us" in quotation marks to indicate the danger of falsely universalizing pronouns.

8 Scholars in Indigenous studies, for instance, long have insisted that the apocalyptic future feared by environmental critics has precedent in the lived experience of their communities. In "Surviving the Sixth Extinction: American Indian Strategies for Life in the New World," the final essay in *After Extinction*, Daryl Baldwin, Margaret Noodin, and Bernard C. Perley insist that "if settler societies want to know what surviving mass extinctions will be like after species extinctions owing to human-induced environmental changes, then all they need to do is look at American Indian communities," and argue that the start date of the Sixth Extinction for Native North Americans was October 12, 1492 (203). In "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene" (*The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann [London & New York: Routledge, 2017]), Kyle Powys Whyte insists that "Anishinaabek already inhabit what our ancestors would have understood as a dystopian future" (207).

9 Matthew Chrulew, "Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation," *Australian Humanities Review* no. 50 (May 2011).

10 Scranton's tagline echoes a scene near the end of Sontag's 1986 short story "The Way We Live Now" (*New Yorker*, November 16, 1986) in which friends of the (anonymous, HIV-positive) man at the center of the story discuss how his illness has affected them: "It's undeniable, isn't it, said Kate on the phone to Stephen, the fascination of the dying. It makes me ashamed. *We're learning how to die*, said Hilda, I'm not ready to learn, said Aileen."

11 This is the title of Scranton's book. See *We're Doomed. Now What? Essays on War and Climate Change* (New York: Soho Press, 2018).

12 Neel Ahuja, "Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (June 2015): 365.

13 Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, "Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 193.

14 Benjamin Bateman, *The Modernist Art of Queer Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). 2.

15 Valerie Rohy, *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27.

16 Sam Anderson, "The Last Two Northern Rhinos on Earth," *New York Times*, January 6, 2021.

17 Michelle Nijhuis, "What Do You Call the Last of a Species?," *New Yorker*, March 2, 2017.

18 As discussed in the introduction, to make this claim is not to deny the presence of queer and trans parents, or to ignore the power of queer parenting, lesbian mothering, and other related practices within broader liberatory projects. Not all queers, whether in the 1980s or today, are nonreproductive, and not all queers embody the end of their family line. My interest in this chapter, however, is specifically in how seropositive writers composing within the shadow of the epidemic rejected the homophobic association of queerness and death not simply by seeking

futurity, reproduction, or "more life," but also by tinkering with extinction itself, and considering how extinct or otherwise dead entities last.

19 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 107.

20 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1995), 113.

21 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 31.

22 It's worth noting that Bateman refers to the homosexual-as-species with the gender-neutral "it." I use the pronoun "he" with regard to Hocquenghem's argument to nod toward the specificity of the gay male context with which his argument is engaged; however, I also take Bateman's "it" as an implicit reminder not to automatically align AIDS with maleness.

23 Such intertwinement also becomes a cultural and narrative through line in queer culture, a paradoxical source of continuity for a "species" that does not last in normative ways. Indeed, it seems important to note that queerness persists not biologically but culturally; as Rohy points out, the homophobic alignment of queerness and extinction is inextricable from the homophobic fear of homosexual increase—the acknowledgment that queerness lasts intergenerationally via memetic, rather than genetic, replication. If we transpose this logic into the recent lexicon of the environmental humanities, we might say that queerness achieves continuity via the transmission not of biological life but of what Thom van Dooren has called a "way of life." AIDS as an extinction event threatened both of these in ways that became mutually confounding. For one approach to preventing the mass loss of gay lives involved curtailing specific erotic practices that were constitutive of a gay "way of life"; in order for gay men to survive, it often seemed, gayness (as a culture, as a set of practices) itself had to die or go extinct. Such a deal with the devil is perhaps only an intensification of a pattern in queer culture, which persistently involves navigating the complex interplay of living, lasting, and extinguishing. Bateman's argument that "queerness encounters an almost impossible dilemma: remain queer and risk extermination, or conform as best as possible and extinguish itself" casts homonormativity as the extinction of the queerness of queerness. I will return to this topic in Chapter 4.

24 Jeff Nunokawa, "'All the Sad Young Men': AIDS and the Work of Mourning," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 311–312.

25 Simon Watney, "The Spectacle of AIDS," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 85.

26 Paul Monette, *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (New York: Mariner Books, 1988), 171.

27 Allen Barnett, *The Body and Its Dangers and Other Stories* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 44.

28 Rebecca Brown, *The Gifts of the Body* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 89.

29 Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," *October* 43 (Winter 1987).

30 Severo Sarduy, "A Wart on My Foot," trans. Carol Maier, in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS*, ed. Thomas Avena (New York: Mercury House, 1994), 208–209.

31 It is the lifelong consequence of any fleeting moment that is central to Tim Dean's claim, in *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), that the sex involved in barebacking subculture is not "casual."

32 Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Bird Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

33 Dagmawi Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 3.

34 Melvin Dixon, *Love's Instruments* (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), 59–60.

35 It is not simply that the death of one *could be*—and likely ultimately *will be*—the death of another, but also that the death of one is often experienced *as* the death of another—or, rather, that the death of another is experienced also as the death of the self. "Sometimes I miss him so much I think that I am him," says a Barnett character of his dead lover (81). Reflects Dixon: "Last summer my lover Richard died. . . . His illness and death were so much a part of my illness and life that I felt that I too had died" (*Love's Instruments* 74).

36 Walt Odets, *In the Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV-Negative in the Age of AIDS* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 14–15.

37 In "White Glasses," Sedgwick likewise writes: "My own real dread has never been about dying young but about losing the people who make me want to live." In *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 264.

38 William Dickey, "Last Time," in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS*, ed. Thomas Avena (New York: Mercury House, 1994), 12.

39 Rebecca Makkai, *The Great Believers* (New York: Viking, 2018), 13.

40 Sarah Schulman, *People in Trouble* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1990), 1.

41 Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989), 88.

42 Peter Coviello, "Apocalypse From Now On," *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, eds. Boone et al (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

43 See Hurley and Oh (among others) for approaches to "apocalypse" that resist generalizability in favor of historical and social specificity. Jessica Hurley, *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020); Rebecca S. Oh, "Apocalyptic Realism: 'A New Category of the Event,'" *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2021).

44 Coviello is one of many thinkers to address the extent to which the visibility of gay men in mainstream American culture was co-emergent with the advent of HIV/AIDS. In the environmental context, we might also note that the appellation "endangered" often inaugurates our knowledge of—and care for—a species. But then, of course, the species is defined in and as its risk. This is also how the term "environment" works—we gained consciousness of "it" only because we began to experience it as under threat.

45 The 1980s saw a rise in popular environmental(ist) consciousness in general, and awareness of species extinction more specifically.

46 As Richard Grusin writes in the introduction to *After Extinction*, "[t]he concept of species extinction first emerged in the eighteenth century to account for the discovery of fossils that had no living correlates. Those fossils challenged predominant Christian notions of the *Great Chain of Being* in which Nature was understood as a complete and perfect whole, created by God without gap or imperfection" (viii, emphasis mine).

47 Essex Hemphill, "Cordon Negro," in *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry* (New York: Plume, 1992), 124–125. It seems important to make a note on genre here. In contrast to the first two chapters, which focused on book-length works of fiction, this chapter focuses on short pieces—poems and short stories. This shift itself tells us something about the foreshortened sense of temporality within which these seropositive writers are composing their works; the compression of genre indicates the compression of time.

48 Melvin Dixon, "I'll Be Somewhere Listening For My Name," *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (2000): 82.

49 Darius Bost, *Evidence of Being: The Black Gay Cultural Renaissance and the Politics of Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 3.

50 Lest it seem that I am stretching the connection among cremation, extinguishing, and extinction, consider the role that ashes play in AIDS literature and activism more generally, from the Ashes Action of October 11, 1992 to the figuration of fire, extinguishing, and ash in Barnett's "Philostorgy, Now Obscure," a topic to which I will soon return. Authors' and activists' attention to the efficacy of fire's *residue* (what comes after the extinguishing) not only again evokes the possibility of understanding queer extinction as somehow generative, but also connects to my broader interest in the power of *residuality*. For more on this topic, see Ensor, "Residually Queer: Toward a Queer Ecological Theory of Burning Out," in *Queer Trash and Feminist Excretions: New Directions in Literary and Cultural Waste Studies*, ed. Rachele Dini (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).

51 Marlon T. Riggs, dir., *Tongues Untied* (Frameline: 1989).

52 Marlon T. Riggs, dir., *Black Is . . . Black Ain't* (1994).

53 In *The Calendar of Loss*, Woubshet reads Monette's and Dixon's work in conversation with Black spirituals as part of his broader project to demonstrate the extent to which the compounding losses of AIDS require a structure of mourning that—insofar as it cannot presume the future consolation of the mourner—has more in keeping with the "temporal conception of loss" at stake in Black mourning than it does with "the psychoanalytic model dominant in queer studies" (17). Linking Black and white gay male poetics in this way does not serve to flatten racial(ized) difference; rather, it demonstrates (and challenges) the extent to which the presumption of whiteness—and the reading of AIDS via theoretical traditions reliant on such a presumption—has impeded critical understandings of AIDS mourning and literature alike.

54 Paul Monette, *Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), xiii.

55 van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 5 (emphasis mine).

56 Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 13.

57 Rick H. Lee, "Reading and AIDS Literacy in Allen Barnett's Short Fiction," *Literature and Medicine* 31, no.1 (2013).

58 This is Teagan Bradway's formulation, as engaged in Chapter 1.

59 Marie Howe, "What the Living Do," in *What the Living Do: Poems* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

60 Any attempt to narrate the experience of *human* extinction seems to be met by its own impossibility; if, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, we have no access to our species-being, then species-level *death* seems doubly out of our experiential and representational reach. See Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 no. 2 (Winter 2009).

61 In my reference to "more life," I refer both to Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* and to Lida Maxwell's treatment of extinction in "Queer/Love/Bird Extinction: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as a Work of Love", to which I will return.

62 Marc Redfield, "Wordsworth's Dream of Extinction," *Qui Parle* 21, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2013): 61.

63 For more on queer philology, see the work of Jeffrey Masten.

64 This is a possibility gleaned from reading the poem in the broader context of the collection.

65 This structure of illegible linguistic persistence also recalls the infinitive's persistence within any conjugated verb, as discussed in Chapter 2.

66 The two versions of the story were quite different; in this chapter, I read the version published in *The Body and Its Dangers*.

67 *Philostorgy*, n. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.

68 Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, 82.

69 Such paradigms of self-estrangement and self-companioning are familiar from *The Professor's House*. The context of epidemic and extinction accentuates the ontological question of whether these past selves of ours are dead or alive. Perhaps the answer is that they are *unliving*.

70 The "now" of the story's title, in other words, contains all that the past was and all that the past failed to be.

71 This might also recall Sedgwick's engagement with Michael Lynch's "legacy to himself" in "White Glasses."

72 "Preston" is also a near-anagram of "St. Peter."

73 When, in 1925, Cather predicted a "long, long life" for *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, she identified such lasting as involving the fact that every great work of literature "must leave in the mind of the sensitive reader an intangible *residuum* of pleasure" (xi).

74 Elsewhere in the story, the priest instructs Kerch: "Find in grief the abandon you used to find in love; grieve the way you used to fuck." In such a command, etymology again becomes relevant. Abandon—from *abandoner*, Old French, to give freely. This recalls Dixon's attention to etymology as a "father's gift."

75 Jacques Khalip, *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hujar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

76 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Pedagogy of Buddhism," in *Touching Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 174–175.

77 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*, ed. Marjorie Pryse (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 133. See Love, *Feeling Backward*, for a discussion of love at last sight and regionalism.

4. Cruising the Planet

1 Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 62.

2 This is Foucault's formulation in "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 136.

3 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1995), 113.

4 He does this himself in the final sentence of "Sociability and Cruising," when he argues that "[i]f our psychic center can finally seem less seductive than our innumerable and imperfect reappearances outside, it should then seem not only imperative but natural to treat the outside as we would a home" (62).

5 As the argument that follows will make clear, in offering an account of cruising that includes and is inspired by, but remains irreducible to, the habits of erotic life, I read the practice as extending well beyond the province of the gay men with whom it is often associated (and by whom the primary texts of this chapter are written). The "we" of this chapter is thus deliberately expansive, conjuring encounters across difference rather than resolving into any stable, identitarian formation. In understanding cruising also as an epistemological habit, I build on Muñoz, who, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), calls for a model of attention "that . . . resembles a kind of politicized cruising" in order to glimpse "the anticipatory illumination of the utopian" (18). The title of the present chapter is an homage to Muñoz's chapter "Cruising the Toilet."

6 In so doing, I am responding to the challenge that Bersani himself issues on his closing page: "Our task now might be to see how viable the relationality we have uncovered in . . . sociability and cruising might be for other types of connectedness" ("Sociability and Cruising," 62).

7 Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 240.

8 Allen Barnett, *The Body and Its Dangers and Other Stories* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 121.

9 I don't mean to reify this definition of "promiscuous"; for an alternative, see Kim TallBear, "Critical Poly 100s," in *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays of Contemporary Writers*, eds. Elissa Washuta and Theresa Warburton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 155.

10 I would be remiss not to mention two articles that think through the queer ecologies of cruising: Zachary Nowak and Kari Roynesdal's "Ecological Deviance: The Botanical Politics of Public-Sex Environments in Parks," *Nature and Space* 5, no. 3 (2022): 1184–1206 and Matthew Gandy's "Queer ecology: nature, sexuality, and heterotopic alliances," *Environment and Planning* 30 (2012): 727–747. My project differs from theirs both because I am foregrounding the specific context of AIDS and because I am interested—as is true throughout this project—in engaging the ecologies that emerge (figurally) through queer literary form, rather than considering the literal encounter between queer sex and material "nature."

11 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) (hereafter cited in text as *TSRTSB*).

12 For another take on Delany's queer ecology, see Tavia Nyong'o, "Back to the Garden: Queer Ecology in Samuel Delany's *Heavenly Breakfast*," *American Literary History* 24 no. 4 (Winter 2012).

13 This phrase comes from Timothy Morton, "Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, The Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul," *Collapse* 6 (January 2010).

14 I will return to the status of propriety—both on its own terms and in relation to Delany's critique of proprietary logics.

15 Insofar as Delany proclaims his disinterest "in the 'freedom' to 'be' 'gay' without any of the existing gay institutions or without other institutions that can take up and fulfill like functions" (194), these extinctions—of gay life and a gay way of life—are hardly separable. Here, recall van Dooren's argument about species extinction, referenced in Chapter 3: "The nomadic form of the life of Passenger Pigeons, moving through the sky in flocks of hundreds of millions of birds that blocked out the sun, had long since come to an end when Martha passed away in 1914. As Passenger pigeon numbers dwindled, the social and behavioral diversity of this unique way of life—of what it was to *be* a passenger pigeon in some fundamental sense—would also have broken down." *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 11. Such a logic appears, too, across works of AIDS literature; in *Unbecoming* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), Eric Michaels claims that "an end to liberated sex" constitutes "the death of gayness" (7).

16 Bollen's quotation is in the introduction to Jonathan Lyndon Chase, "Samuel R. Delany on Street Wisdom and Cruising's Golden Age," *Interview*, September 14, 2021, www.interviewmagazine.com.

17 Peter *Coviello, Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 2.

18 Although Delany focuses on the changes to Times Square in the 1980s and early 1990s, he insists that "New York City has anticipated and actively planned this redevelopment since the start of the sixties" (xiii). In *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), Sarah Schulman provides an account of the co-incidence of

AIDS and the gentrification of various New York neighborhoods, and how the former abetted the latter.

19 Delany's afutural posture in *TSRTSB* is especially interesting in the context of his career as a writer of science fiction. That he conducts his critique of real estate speculation in an avowedly non-speculative mode offers an alternative to the way that many critics engaged with liberatory futurisms attend to "the proximity, whether by chance, alliance, or antagonism, between the speculative in speculative finance capital and the speculative in speculative fiction" (Lou Cornum, "Seizing the Alterity of Futures: Toward a Philosophy of History across Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism," *History of the Present* 13, no. 2 [October 2023]: 170).

20 Given how often Delany refers to his aging across decades spent in the theaters, we might also understand *TSRTSB* as the aging of AIDS literature: a poignant idea given that almost none of the authors discussed in Chapter 3 had the opportunity to age.

21 *Cruise*, v. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.

22 Such a possibility may seem less ridiculous when we consider Delany's account of how Guy Debord shaped his understanding of the sociosexual practices of urban life: "Debord defined '*la derivé*' as 'a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society. . . .' To quote Wikipedia, it is an unplanned journey through a landscape, usually urban, in which participants drop their everyday relations and (Debord again) 'let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there'" (Alex Wermer-Colan, "Promiscuous Autobiography on Facebook: An Interview with Samuel R. Delany, Part II," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 10, 2020). Bracketing the role of the urban, I can think of few better descriptions of the *Pointed Firs* narrator's experience of Dunnet Landing than this final phrase.

23 Cruise, from the Dutch *kruis* and the Spanish *cruzar*: to cross.

24 One provocation of this chapter is to trace how letting *Pointed Firs* and *TSRTSB* sit "by one another, "shoulder to shoulder" (146)—like the men in the Times Square theaters, like Delany's own juxtaposed essays, like the main text and the sidebar in the second half of his book—enables us to understand both works' insistently stony, impersonal, ambient intimacies in new terms. Rather than return to readings of Jewett in the main body of the text, I cite relevant moments from *Pointed Firs* in notes, thus also echoing the structure of adjacency (and the rhythm of reading) foundational to Delany's own method. If it is surprising or counterintuitive to think these two texts together, then that, too, is part of the point. As in the moviehouses, this encounter is not predicated on preexisting affinity or avowed similarity, and its "success" (or power) is not contingent on any kind of direct, predictable, or permanent effect. Rather, when we let the two texts fleetingly share space, what we sense are postural and gestural echoes, brief moments of contact whose consequence ramifies unpredictably and asymmetrically across this argument. Such a resonance might, in turn, invite us again to consider the political relevance of Jewett's work—not by resolving its reticence into action but rather by heeding the lasting power of anonymity, impersonality, and ambience themselves.

25 This image of the feeling of association as such might remind us of my argument in Chapter 2 that Tom Outland represents for Godfrey St. Peter, much as Ántonia Shimerda represents for Jim Burden, "anything that a [wo]man can be to a man." Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 363.

26 Delany thus demonstrates anew the relevance of urban spaces and practices to environmental thought, a field that—despite the changing foci of critical attention—still tends to be dominated by more familiarly "natural" spaces.

27 Gabriel Rotello, *Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men* (New York: Dutton, 1997). The comparison to *Silent Spring* comes from Frederic M. Biddle, "Grim warning on AIDS in the

90s," *Boston Globe*, July 23, 1997, D6. Nyong'o also uses the phrase "sexual ecology," but does not engage Rotello.

28 In Rotello's argument, it takes HIV to make sexuality ecological; he understands erotic contact in terms of an ecological system only once that contact is pathologized. Within his conception of ecology, then, queer eroticism is legible only as a threat—and casual sex, insofar as it contributes to pathogens' "spread," constitutes the greatest threat of all. But *TSRTSB* demonstrates the ways in which sexuality is *already* ecological, in which its effects disperse and roam in non-pathological—and oft-beneficial—ways.

29 It would be a misrepresentation to overstate the distinction between networking and contact. Indeed, *TSRTSB* demonstrates the extent to which contact is not the *negation* of personalized relations but rather the *precondition* for them. Thus, we might read networking as an attempt to *privatize* or *contain* or *enclose* contact, to give it predictable shape and teleological direction by pre-determining the kinds of people included in a social network. Although I do not have room to take up Delany's treatment of class in as much detail as it deserves, I suggest in this chapter that his investment in non-proprietary forms of relation is a way of resisting two intertwined forms of privatization: (a) the emphasis on private (or secured and *privatized*) property at the expense of truly public urban spaces and (b) the reification of personal identity (and its accompanying forms of identitarian sociality).

30 If such a reading threatens to de-eroticize cruising, I in fact mean the transit to go the other way. For to take Delany's argument seriously is to read the erotic as a force that spreads outward from the theaters to the neighborhood, shaping and even constituting daily life in turn. Read this way, Delany's argument dovetails with Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen's interest in shifting "sexuality" from something understood primarily via "human or animal genital relations" to a phenomenon "more broadly" involving "the constitutive pleasure and potentiality of forms of corporeal communing." See Luciano and Chen, "Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21 nos. 2–3 (2015): 185.

31 In *Pointed Firs*, interpersonal comfort is repeatedly measured in terms of the other's ability to be forgotten. During the afternoon that the narrator spends with Elijah Tilley, for instance, "[h]e stopped his [knitting] work and clasped his hands together. [She] saw he had forgotten his guest, and [she] kept the afternoon watch with him" (122).

32 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 149.

33 Choose any identitarian commitment and there exists a way to yoke our environmental investments to it. In *Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2011), Sandra Steingraber proclaims that "[u]ltimately, the environmental crisis is a parenting crisis" (281). Articles during Pride or LGBTQ+ History Month often foreground the work of LGBTQ+ environmentalists. The Acton Institute maintains a long list of faith-based environmental groups. The examples could go on seemingly indefinitely.

34 Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2010), xvi. Lest this reference seem dated, consider the collectively authored "Declaration of Rebellion" that opens *This is Not a Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), which—like many contemporary calls to action—similarly relies on personalizing and moralizing tropes.

35 Stacy Alaimo, "MCS Matters: Material Agency in the Science and Practices of Environmental Illness," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* (Spring 2009): 11.

36 Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," 50.

37 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 4. For more on the relationship between the nonhuman turn (including potentially flattening claims like Bennett's notion that "*we* are . . . nonhuman") and the practices of dehumanization at stake in racist and homophobic/transphobic violence, see Luciano and Chen, 2015. For an account of how reckoning with the history of antiblackness affects the category of the "human" (and hence affects any attempt to be "posthuman"), see Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

38 Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity," *Ecozon@* 3, no.1 (2012): 86.

39 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 27.

40 Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 6.

41 Perhaps the primary site of divergence between Bersani's psychoanalytic account of cruising and Delany's "Marxian" one involves the status of difference. When Bersani argues that "in ideal cruising . . . we leave our selves behind," the relinquishment importantly includes markers of difference. Describing the bathhouse as the ideal site for such practices because "the common bathhouse uniform—a towel—communicates very little . . . about our social personality (economic privilege, class status, taste)," he ultimately argues that "[t]he inadequate subjectivity that sociability requires—the self-subtraction—is, by definition, the absence of . . . psychic, sexual, and social differences" (61). The men in Delany's pages, by contrast, are described in and as their differences.

42 Indeed, Delany opens and closes the first half of the book by meditating on his specific experiences as a "black gay" male/man (xv, 108). Although he foregrounds race here, the book as a whole pays considerably more attention to class difference than to racial difference, and to the importance of cross-class relationships than of interracial ones. I will return to his critique of gentrification and the forms of sameness it privileges.

43 Throughout *Pointed Firs*, meaningful relationships are rarely predicated on closeness, warmth, or other "traditional" signs of human intimacy. Not only are many of the narrator's most moving encounters with the dead, but characters often need to relinquish or diminish their own human vitality to gain access to the town's patterns of relation. As we saw in Chapter 1, when the narrator is present for Mrs. Todd's reunion with her old friend Mrs. Fosdick, the sign that she is welcomed into the conversation comes from the fact that "subjects of an intimate nature were no more withheld from [her] ears than if [she] had been a shell on the mantelpiece" (59). Here, the ideal companion is implicitly stony and inanimate, characterized by her ability to become environmental. Whereas Luciano and Chen's approach to "inhuman" (2015, 185), "transmaterial intimacy" (2019, 114) relies upon the appearance of an inanimate object in the relational scene—Audre Lorde's bookshelf in "Uses of the Erotic" (2019) or the boulder with which Laura Aguilar poses in *Grounded #114* (2015)—Jewett's work, like Delany's insistence on staying with the depersonalizing dynamics of the theater, demonstrates that scenes of "human" sexuality involve de-anthropocentric erotics, that "the suggestively queer connections between flesh and stone" (2015, 184) can emerge via postures of *stoniness*, rather than requiring the presence of an "actual" stone. We might here think, too, of geologic eroticisms like the practices of the "stone butch." See Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, "Queer Inhumanisms," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019).

44 Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 196.

45 Morton, similarly, claims that "ecological . . . interdependence implies that there is *less to* things than meets the eye." "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125 no. 2 (March 2010): 277.

46 Whereas critics tend to understand the *Pointed Firs* narrator's anonymity as proof either of identity (her lack of defining characteristics or a name of her own making her a ready proxy for Sarah Orne Jewett herself) or of the fact that she is an interchangeable cog in an exploitative tourist economy, I instead understand it as characterizing a mode of relation that permits strangeness to persist. By the end of *Pointed Firs*, the only concrete information we know about the narrator is that she is from the city, is a writer, and is "no longer very young" (112). What we have come to know instead are the shapes of her movements, the cadence of her attention, her habits of relating.

47 In *Tomorrow's Parties,* Coviello similarly asks of Jewett's queer sodalities: "What does it mean to fall in love not with another person but with a scene of sociability?" (82). Indeed, the narrator of *Pointed Firs* falls in love with a place rather than with a "single person" (1).

48 Across *Pointed Firs*, we encounter interpersonal interactions that never endure as such, but disperse into—and are re-experienced through—the ambient dimensions of the environment: Mrs. Todd's plodding gait indexed by the scent of thyme in the garden (3), Mrs. Blackett's atmospheric mothering shimmering in the "sunburst upon [the] outermost island" (30), and the day that the narrator shares with both women persisting in the "shy whippoorwills singing that night" as the scented evening air "blew in again and again with every gentle rising of the seabreeze" (55).

49 Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 122, 113.

50 Here I refer again to the discussion of Cather's Godfrey St. Peter in Chapter 2.

51 Allen Barnett, *The Body and Its Dangers and Other Stories* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 121.

52 Both of these etymologies index a commitment to allowing things to be "not one's own."

53 Robert Reid-Pharr, "Foreword" to *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, twentieth anniversary edition, (New York: New York University Press, 2019), xiii.

54 Moving from identities to acts is also to unravel the logic that precipitated the first queer "extinction" that interests this project—the codification of sexuality, or the birth of the homosexual as a species.

55 That this model emphasizes posture over identity is part of what allows me to understand cruising as a relational and ecological mode that might be adapted more broadly.

56 Or, in Seymour's terms, a differently "bad environmentalism." See *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

57 Alex Wermer-Colan, "Promiscuous Autobiography on Facebook: An Interview with Samuel R. Delany, Part II," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 10, 2020.

58 Luciano and Chen, "Queer Inhumanisms," 116.

59 Reid-Pharr, "Foreword," xii.

60 Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 19.

61 I am thinking here of Edelman's critique of politics/reproductive futurism in *No Future*.

62 If the narrowness that Luciano and Chen identify is emblematic of both "pragmatic" politics and the logic of gentrification, then it may also reflect the ideological premise of monogamy, with its belief that we can necessarily do more with one object of our attention than with many, or that to engage in multiple registers is necessarily to diminish the quality of our engagement.

63 Keguro Macharia, "Not This. More That!," *New Inquiry*, July 23, 2018.

64 To the extent that Delany does have an objective, it involves breadth: he advocates for new institutions that would make the social function and services of the porn theaters "available not only to gay men but to all men and women, gay and straight, over *an even wider social range* than did the old ones" (xvii, emphasis mine).

65 Macharia is linking Lorde's "erotic" and Delany's "pleasant," but his words apply equally well to Delany's text itself, with its attention to the interplay of pleasure and pleasantness.

66 In other words, to the extent that *TSRTSB* conjures a future, it conjures a future-lessness.

67 I borrow "magnitudes of loss" from Ann Cvetkovich's account of Douglas Crimp's work in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): "Crimp also notes that trauma takes many forms, that AIDS means not just the specter of death but also the loss of particular forms of sexual contact and culture, and that one might mourn the loss of unsafe sex as much as the death of one's friends or prospect of one's own death. . . . Moreover, the claim that safe sex constitutes a loss challenges the dismissal of certain practices as decadent or perverse as well as the tendency to think that only certain forms or magnitudes of loss count as real" (163).

68 Julian Lucas, "How Samuel R. Delany Reimagined Sci-Fi, Sex, and the City," *New Yorker*, July 3, 2023. I was initially struck by this description because it echoes the subtitle of Daniel Sherrill's recent ecomemoir *Warmth*, which I discussed in the introduction: *Coming of Age at the End of Our World*.

69 As does Delany's own insistence that the plan to redevelop Times Square long predated the advent of AIDS.

70 As Reid-Pharr articulates, "[t]he critique that [Delany] so boldly offers to the rest of us, however, is not simply that he sees more broadly than we do, but instead that this process is surprisingly simple" (xiv).

71 Here, we might hear echoes of Sedgwick dilating the ontological crack between the living and the dead, or the space that Barnett limns between obscurity and obsolescence. Besideness is also, as I discussed in Chapter 1, one of Sedgwick's privileged modes.

72 Luciano and Chen, "Queer Inhumanisms," 117.

73 And here, we might sense the Sedgwickian insistence on nondualism, transposed from the seeking of pleasure associated with [reparative] reading to the seeking of pleasure associated with cruising.

74 Elizabeth Freeman, "Still After," in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 31.

75 Here I am referring primarily to Lorde's argument in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).

76 And, as is true of queer lasting more generally, the relationship between the registers of damage/harm and intimacy/possibility.

77 I use these ideologically loaded terms as a way of gesturing toward Delany's project of redefining words we think we already know. "Safe" is chief among them (see 121–122), but the others figure into his text too.

78 As we saw in Chapter 1, Jewett's adjectives similarly alight; "poor" hovers atmospherically between the characters ("Poor Dear," "Poor Joanna") and those who survive them, limning the space of relation they continue to share. If, in Jewett, the free-floating adjective marks a relation that persists even after death, then in Delany the parallel rhetorical technique marks an effect that persists and spreads even after an encounter's nominal end.

79 Likewise, "pleasantness," the noun, which appears increasingly frequently as the text unfurls, may be understood as "pleasant," the adjective, detached from concrete referent and moving

atmospherically.

80 Such logic is also clear if we take seriously the terms of Delany's own metaphors, which nod to the specter of HIV/AIDS. For by analogizing contact to the lymphatic system, he insists that contact is not itself the pathogen, nor itself automatically the antidote, but rather the responsive ground where health or illness can roost.

5. Persistent Decay

1 Holly Morris and Anne Bogart, dir., *The Babushkas of Chernobyl* (Chicken and Egg Pictures, 2016).

2 I here refer to Christina Sharpe's argument in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016)*.

3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 209.

4 I am thinking here primarily of a set of roughly contemporaneous texts, most notably *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2011, and Michael Warner's "Queer and Then?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 1, 2012, both of which I will discuss at greater length shortly.

5 Even though this chapter is not explicitly built around a scene of futurelessness, it certainly evokes more than one. Reading the "ongoing AIDS pandemic" and the ongoing possibility of nuclear warfare as "major termini in the public imaginary," Julia Bryan-Wilson argues that "both queerness and the nuclear have the potential to foreclose our notions of the future, or, at the very least, provide a different model for thinking about temporality." See Bryan-Wilson, "Aftermath: Two Queer Artists Respond to Nuclear Spaces," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, ed. Emily Eliza Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 88, 87.

6 My recombinatory method also means this chapter deliberately does not have a single, steady center, except for the conceptual/formal interest in fallout. It deliberately roams across texts and periods, handling each with a light touch. As is perhaps appropriate, given the animating concerns of the project, this final chapter is less about holding on than letting go.

7 All of these quotations are from Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2, except for the final one, which is found on 209.

8 Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.

9 I would be remiss if I didn't mention a series of critical works that engage nuclear fallout ecocritically and/or queerly: in addition to Jessica Hurley's *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), and Bryan-Wilson's "Aftermath," see Shiloh Krupar, *Hot Spotter's Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). As was the case with cruising, my engagement with nuclearity is more figural than theirs; that said, it is worth acknowledging that fallout as invoked in nuclear discourse is, itself, already a figure, a way of making legible shapes of harm and spread. Relatedly, in what follows, I stray at various points from the technical paradigms at work in nuclear physics in order to track the figurative imaginary at work in queer thought. Centrifugal movement, in other words, doesn't necessarily make things fall apart (or out), but various thinkers use the term in that way, and I follow their lead.

10 These are all quotations from Sedgwick that I engaged in Chapter 1. The first four are from "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 6, 6, 7, 5; the final one is from the Introduction to *Touching Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

11 Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 88.

12 James Merrill, "Japan: Prose of Departure," *New York Review of Books*, December 18, 1986.

13 Their essay by that title invites us to consider how "[s]emantically, *bonds* holds together something humane and sociable with the objectivity of the inhuman *thing*: bonds as in physical restraints, bonds of matrimony, of an obligation in law, of *atoms*" (223, final emphasis mine).

14 I refer here again to Ramzi Fawaz's argument in *Queer Forms*.

15 Insofar as such plotlessness is characteristic of regionalism's askance response to futurity, such an inquiry is also a way of asking what responses to slow violence might look like when they, too, aren't oriented toward a future.

16 *Fallout*, n. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com

17 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 31. We might here think both of the Children of Chernobyl (those born after the nuclear accident who inherited the damage caused by radiation) and of the logic of surrogacy at stake in Cather's *The Professor's House*, as discussed in Chapter 2, where the most important thing in the protagonist's life in fact technically "happened" to someone else.

18 Mary Mycio, *Wormwood Forest: A Natural History of Chernobyl* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2005), 39.

19 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 6.

20 In "After Thoughts," Jonathan Goldberg suggests that "it may be that queer theory is less over than continuing under other rubrics and in other venues." As he goes on to reflect, "to perceive that future possibility in the present might mean that our sense of the past needs to be rethought. What was queer theory?" *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 35.

21 Observes Valerie Rohy in *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): "to be 'born gay' in [homophobic] discourse is to be born into a ghostly half-life" (53). Importantly, the arithmetic of the "half-life" is also a racialized one. For instance, we might read Ruha Benjamin's "Black AfterLives Matter" (*Boston Review*, July 16, 2018, www.bostonreview.net) as demonstrating how white supremacy is predicated on the logic of half-lives. In arguing that "[w]hite afterlife is . . . a threat to black life," she defines the former as "a world of second chances," a doubling of life predicated not only on the myth of white innocence but also on the way in which, "[v]ampirically, white vitality feeds on black demise."

22 Neimanis and Hamilton, "falling out together," *feral feminisms* 10 (fall 2021): 126, 123. This piece is in part an engagement with my "Queer Fallout: Samuel R. Delany and the Ecology of Cruising" essay, a significantly earlier version of Chapter 4, which was published in *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2017): 149–166.

23 Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), xiv.

24 In both cases, I can't help but hear Sedgwick's "ontological crack" or Poor Dear's broken cup that indexes the openness of the past (see Chapter 1) or the fragile bowl that Preston hands off so carefully to Jim (see Chapter 3).

25 "The Art of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*," *New England Quarterly* 32 no. 1 (March 1959): 51–52 (emphasis mine).

26 Guy Reynolds, *Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 148.

27 In the face of critiques of regionalism that identify its centrifugal decay with lifelessness and "inanition" (Berthoff, "The Art of Jewett's *Pointed Firs*"), recent critics have sought to bring the mode back to the "center" of our narratives, a move in keeping with the centripetal tendencies of ecocriticism. See, for instance, Samaine Lockwood's *Archives of Desire: The Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and June Howard's *The Center of the World: Regional Writing and the Puzzles of Place-Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). In contrast to an approach that centers regionalism (or, in Lockwood's case, the spinsters at its heart), I stay with the edges.

28 Scott Herring, "Catherian Friendship; or, How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 82, 82, 78, 78 (emphases mine).

29 Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 3.

30 David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62 (original emphasis).

31 See Chen, *Animacies*, 83 for more on queer as grammatical chameleon. By foregrounding Halperin's account here, I don't mean to identify queer theory with antinormativity, but rather to attend to the modes of destabilizing critique that animated much early work in the field.

32 Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," 9.

33 Paul Monette, *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (New York: Mariner Books, 1988), 64.

34 And so too does he join a range of other poets and writers living with AIDS in evoking "half-lives" as an indicator for their exclusion from normative vitality. Monette plays with queer life *as* half-life (even before the advent of an epidemic disease) throughout his body of work, from the titles of works like *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story* and *Halfway Home* and "Half Life" to the play with relational "half"ness throughout *Borrowed Time*.

35 For discussions of the relationship between queer theory and nuclear criticism, see Hurley, *Infrastructures of Apocalypse*, Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Queer Temporalities of the Nuclear Condition," in *The Silence of Fallout: Nuclear Criticism in a Post-Cold War World*, eds. Michael Blouin, Morgan Shipley, and Jack Taylor (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), and Coviello, "Apocalypse from Now On."

36 *Half-life*, n. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.

37 Paul Monette, “Half Life,” in *Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 16–17.

38 Here we might recall Freeman’s account in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) of how queers “gather up, literally, life’s outtakes and waste products and bind them into fictitious but beautiful (w)holes.”

39 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 183.

40 Monette, “Half Life.”

41 I draw this language from Freeman’s *Time Binds*, xvi, xvii.

42 Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, “Introduction,” in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Halley and Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

43 Kadji Amin, “Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory’s Affective Histories,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 44, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2016): 175 (first three emphases mine).

44 Importantly, to say that something diminishes doesn’t mean that harm diminishes, as my engagement with bodies diminishing at the end of life hopefully already suggests.

45 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Pedagogy of Buddhism,” in *Touching Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 174.

46 Susan Sontag, “The Way We Live Now,” *New Yorker*, November 16, 1986.

47 I am here again thinking of E. Patrick Johnson’s comment in the Foreword to *Long Term: Essays on Queer Commitment* that queers have committed to death because death is what has committed to us.

48 For more on queer activism’s relationship to literal and figurative remains, see Ensor, “Residually Queer.” This might also recall my discussion of Dixon’s account of “double cremation,” as discussed in Chapter 3.

49 Paul Saint-Amour, “Weak Theory, Weak Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity* 25, no. 3 (2018), 456.

50 Jeff Nunokawa, “Queer Theory: *Postmortem*,” in *After Sex?*, 246–247 (emphases mine).

51 This is a line from “Finale B,” from the 1996 musical *Rent*, as discussed in the notes to the introduction.

52 “Diminished thing” is a reference to Philip Gambone’s reading of Allen Barnett’s *The Body and Its Dangers*, to which I will return.

53 Freeman, “Still After,” 31.

54 If one implicit claim of Chapter 2 was that some (queer) lives cannot be lived in their own time, but can become possible only as afterlives, then Freeman here implies that some thoughts cannot be thought in their own time, but can only ever be afterthought.

55 In reading *The Professor’s House* anachronistically, I am heeding another hermeneutic practice I have learned from AIDS literature. In “Meditations in Zurich,” Bo Huston writes: “Keep returning to the Yeats poem [‘The Second Coming’]. How could he have written a poem about AIDS back in 1920? *The ceremony of innocence is drowned*. How did he know about the blood-dimmed tide? Well, he didn’t, obviously. It’s just that AIDS is not the first time, and will not be the last, that *mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*.” In *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), 103.

56 Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 171.

57 Freeman, “Still After,” 29.

58 Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (New York: Random House, 1925), 3.

59 Mike Davis, “Los Angeles After the Storm: The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster,” *Antipode: A Journal of Radical Geography* 27 no. 3 (July 1995): 221–241.

60 Philip Gambone, ed., *Something Inside: Conversations with Gay Fiction Writers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

61 Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, eds., *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 375.

62 See Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011). The structure of *The Professor’s House* also literalizes Freeman’s account of queer formalist reading practices: queers “[h]ollow out the center but preserve the husk.”

63 Here I also evoke Cather’s novelistic principles as theorized in “The Novel Démeublé,” *New Republic* 30, no. 384, April 12, 1922.

64 Here I am referring to the work of Sam Bakkila, as discussed in Chapter 2.

65 In *Pointed Firs*, indifference is sometimes “lofty” and sometimes “scornful.” It is also the variegated affect unexpectedly expressed when Mrs. Todd encounters her islanded mother after a long separation.

66 Sedgwick, “Introduction: Queerer than Fiction” (*Studies in the Novel* 28, no. 3 (1996): 278.

67 Sedgwick and Adam Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (1995): 521. This engagement with love remains when the essay is revised for publication in *Touching Feeling*.

68 Saint-Amour, 444; Dimock cited on 445.

69 Robert Azzarello, *Queer Environmentality: Ecology, Evolution, and Sexuality in American Literature* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 28.

70 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 128.

71 Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 168.

72 Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties,* 88.

Epilogue

1 Gillian Friedman, “Utah’s AIDS crisis, then and now: From one doctor in the 1980s to the U’s new free clinic,” *Deseret News*, January 29, 2018.

2 In *Quiet Heroes*, Snyder explains that she counted the deaths of her patients until the number reached 500 and then had to stop that practice in order to go on with the work. See Jenny Mackenzie, Jared Ruga, and Amanda Stoddard, dirs., *Quiet Heroes* (Vavani Productions, 2018).

3 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*, ed. Marjorie Pryse (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 24, 25, 26.

4 Warner Berthoff, “The Art of Jewett’s *Pointed Firs*,” *New England Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1959): 44.

5 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 128.

Index

Page numbers in *italics* indicate Figures

absence of absence, 174, 188, 192
accidental: environmentalism, 152; extinction, 77, 91, 93, 96, 103–6; future, 100; kinships, xv, 134
accidents: Cather and, 132; ethics and, 163; intimacy and, 185; political movements and, 161; of queer life, 158; relationship to intent, 162; urban planning and, 154
action, collective, xv, 4, 44, 67, 158, 214n14; (in)direct, 19, 88
adjectives, 162–63, 217n9, 224n87, 249n78, 250n79
adverbs, 14, 42, 51, 59, 155, 188, 230n33; adverbial modifications, 62, 199, 231n46
affect, 15–16, 78, 112, 138, 151
affirmative sufficiency, 99
After Extinction (Grusin), 105, 239n46
"after" logics: afterglow, 157, 186, 190, 201; afterlives, 37, 170, 173–74, 252n21, 254n54; afterthoughts, 190
aftermath, 76, 126, 159, 168, 171; fallout, 177–78; linearity of, 173–74
After Sex? (Halley, Parker), 24, 186–89
After the Party (Chambers-Letson), 178–79, 184
agency, 40–42, 46, 52–53, 172–73; agentive subjects, 16, 40; Sedgwick on the middle ranges of, 49–50, 88–89
Ahuja, Neel, 10, 107
AIDS, 63, 232n2, 237n22, 238n23, 243n18, 249n67, 250n5; carework, 24, 27–28, 42, 44–45, 202, 230n32, 241n49; compounding loss and, 111, 119, 240n53; crisis, 10, 14–15, 33, 35, 106–20, 154–55, 164, 189, 203–4; deaths related to, 29, 35, 67, 109, 114–16, 123, 141–45, 182, 185–87; temporality and, 111, 115–17, 119; Times Square and, 137–57, 164, 249n69
AIDS literature, 5, 202, 226n112, 234n31, 240n50, 243n15, 254n55; extinction and, 30, 35, 103–7, 109–10; promiscuous care in, 130–35, 137; radioactivity and, 181, 184; witnesses in, 111. *See also specific literature*
Alaimo, Stacy, 148
All We Can Save Project, 39
"already dead" model, 40–41
Amin, Kadji, 22, 25, 187
anachronism, 14, 23, 186, 191
Angels in America (Kushner), 241
animacy, grammatical, 12, 15–18
Animal's People (Sinha), 171
anonymity, 32, 139–40, 144–45, 149, 160–61, 172, 244n24, 247n46
anthro-decentric erotics, 145–52

Anthropocene, 40, 64, 71, 113, 173
antiblackness, 115, 246n37
apocalyptic realism, 11, 220n43
An Archive of Feelings (Cvetkovich), 249n67
"The Art of Jewett's Pointed Firs" (Berthoff), 52–54, 179, 204
"art of loosing," 37, 47, 158, 170, 174, 202, 203
"attending closely," 51, 142
"at the last," xvi, 4, 33, 170, 218n19
"autonaturalizing," 3–4, 217n9
Azoulay, Ariella, 72, 74, 80–81, 90
Azzarello, Robert, 199, 223n77

The Babushkas of Chernobyl (documentary), 167–68
backward, backwardness and, 5–6, 75, 78, 95, 100, 157, 191; formalism and, 23; in literary regionalism, 25; Love on feeling, 14
Bakkila, Sam, 82–83, 234n31
Baldwin, Daryl, 107, 236n8
Barnett, Allen, 31, 35, 112, 122–25, 191, 249n71, 254n52
Bateman, Benjamin, 14, 107, 237n22, 238n23
Beck, Ulrich, 176
beginnings, 45, 145, 229n23, 233n26
belatedness, 1, 14, 21–22, 24, 42–43, 169–70, 177, 186–89, 191–92, 201; ethics and, 5, 89; love and, 199; queer theory and, 23–24
Bellamy, Brent, 7
belonging, 48, 93, 149
Benjamin, Ruha, 215n2, 252n21
Bennett, Jane, 147
Berlant, Lauren, 14, 20
Bersani, Leo, 36, 109, 136–38, 140–51, 242nn4–6, 246n41
Berthoff, Warner, 52–54, 179, 204
Beside You in Time (Freeman), 14
biological reproduction, 108, 136
Bishop, Elizabeth, 47
"Black AfterLives Matter" (Benjamin), 215n2, 252n21
Black Is . . . Black Ain't (film), 115
Black spirituals, 116, 240n53
Blake, Harrison Otis Gray, 6
Bodewadmimwin/Potawatomi (Anishinaabe language), 17
The Body and its Dangers (Barnett), 122–23, 130, 193, 254n52
Bogart, Anne, 167
Bollen, Christopher, 138
Borrowed Time (Monette), 110, 134, 181–82

Bost, Darius, 115–16
Bradway, Teagan, 20, 41, 51
Brainard, Joe, 25
breast cancer, 42, 44–45, 47–48, 181
Brim, Matt, xv, 213n5, 214n11, 214n14
Brodhead, Richard, 52, 55
Brown, Rebecca, 110, 230n32
Bryan-Wilson, Julia, 9, 250n5
Buddhism, 46–47, 49–50

The Calendar of Loss (Woubshet), 111, 119, 240n53
Campbell, Donna, 53
Campt, Tina, 16
Canavan, Gerry, 2, 216n5
capitalism, 3, 17–18, 39–40, 43, 85, 92, 138, 157, 162, 168, 243n19
care, carework and, xiv, 4, 11, 33, 50, 224n83, 226n112; AIDS, 24, 27–28, 42, 44–45, 202, 230n32, 241n49; capitalist logics and, 39; collateral model of, 36; "deathcare" as, 41–42, 51, 63–64, 73; environmental, xv, 137, 152, 164; HIV/AIDS doulas and, 34, 65–66, 231n55; institutional abandonment and, 213n14; palliative, 41, 51, 63–64, 67–69; promiscuous, 130–35, 137; terminal, 51–52, 64–69, 158, 187–89, 231n46
Carson, Rachel, 133, 173, 176, 224n84
Casid, Jill, 41–42, 51
casual causality, 152–58
casual sex, 36, 138–39, 141–42
Cather, Willa, 225n100, 233n26, 233n28, 241n73; Dickinson and, 46; grammar, 72, 78–97, *195*, 196–97, 234n31, 235n48; Hemphill and, 203; regionalism and, 26–28, 31, 34–35, 74–90, 101–2; subjunctive possibilities and, 70–76. *See also specific works*
causality, 36, 137–38, 152–58, 169–70
Cavell, Stanley, 56
Cazdyn, Eric, 41
centrifugal movement, 28, 37, 175–85, 193–99, 251n9
centripetal imaginaries, 170–75, 193, 252n27
Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 241n60
Chambers-Letson, Joshua, 178–79, 184
Chen, Mel Y., 107, 147–48, 154, 247n43, 248n62; on grammatical animacy, 12, 15, 17
Chernobyl explosion, 37, 167–68, 176, 181–82, 186
child-as-future trope, 1, 12–13, 215n2, 219n31
Chisholm, Dianne, 8–9
choice, 50, 64, 67, 114
chronological time, 14
Chrulew, Matthew, 106, 133
Chu, Andrea Long, 228n16
citizenship, 92–93, 100–101

Clark, Nigel, 8–9
class, 3, 32, 142, 148, 245n29, 246n42
climate change, climate catastrophe and, 2–3, 63, 190, 236n6; death and, 40, 106; failure and, 70; global, 7, 33, 39–40, 106, 119, 159
Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, 147
Cole, Henri, 182
collateral effects (damage and benefit), 40, 132–33, 158–61
collective, collectivizing and, 27, 33, 52, 94, 109, 118; action, xv, 4, 44, 67, 158, 214n14; death, 110; endeavors, xv, 75; experience of terminality, 43; extinction, 104, 111–12; grammars, 19; present, 89, 168; in regionalism, 27; stewardship, 66–67; survival, 3; terminality, 49, 61, 64–65
colonialism, coloniality and, 25, 73; settler, 3, 16–18, 90–97, 235n40, 236n8
companioning, 42, 58, 65, 133, 140, 187; self, 50, 88, 99, 127, 241n69
conditional, past, 16, 72–73, 84, 88, 96–97
conjugated verbs, 81, 83–84, 86, 89, 96–98, 100–101, 145, 202, 234n31, 241n65
contact (Delany), 141–145, 150, 153, 157–165, 185
contingent, contingency and, 42–43, 47, 95, 144–45, 161
continuance, continuity and, xiv–xv, 2–4, 10, 30–31, 46, 102, 172
“Cordon Negro” (Hemphill), 114, 117
Cornum, Lou, 3, 217n9
corpse watching, 62–63
cosmology, 93; Indigenous, 16–17, 222n64
counterfactual imaginaries, 25, 73–74, 82, 94
The Country of the Pointed Firs (Jewett) (*Pointed Firs*), 226n112, 229n23, 241n73, 244n24, 247n43; ability to be forgotten in, 245n31; Cather preface to, 34–35, 75–76, 101–2; the end in, 50, 60–61; indifference in, 254n65; love in, 180; narrator in, 43, 53–62, 139, 202–3, 247nn46–48; persistence and, 75; terminal friendship in, 53–62; terminality and, 52–53
COVID-19 pandemic, 67, 70–71
Coviello, Peter, 174, 202, 226n105, 239n44; on extinction, 5, 28–32, 226n105; on sexuality, 30–31, 74, 134–35, 179–80, 199; on temporality, 14
Crane, Gregg, 19
cremation, 240n50; double, 114–15, 253n48
Crimp, Douglas, 249n67
cruising, 136, 148–49, 185, 242nn4–5, 245n30, 246n41, 248n55; Delany on, 35–36, 137–65, 202 , 204; as futureless encounters, 35–36; queer ecology of, 140–45; urban intimacies and, 32, 184, 231n47
Cruising Utopia (Muñoz), 215n2, 242n5
Cvetkovich, Ann, 249n67

dead, 224n84; ends, 28, 108, 109; languages, 32, 93, 107, 120, 122–24, 127
death, 224n83, 228n7, 230n28, 233n29, 239n35, 255n2; AIDS-related, 29, 35, 67, 109, 114–16, 123, 141–45, 182, 185–87; “already dead” model, 40–41; association of queerness and, 237n18; climate change and, 40, 106; collective, 110; “deathcare” and, 41–42, 51, 63–64, 73; doulas, 63–69, 101; individual, 105, 111, 118; “last sight” and, 134; learning how to die, 40, 43, 46–47, 49, 106, 119, 132–33, 228n8, 237n10; mass, 35, 109, 119, 133; militaristic model of, 40–41; near-

death experiences, 77–78, 98, 103–4, 193; nuclear fallout and, 176; in *The Professor's House*, 95, 192–93; proximity to, 132, 182, 203; regionalism addressing, 30, 56, 59–62; threat of total gay death, 10; unrealized life and, 78
"deathcare," 41–42, 51, 63–64, 73
death-in-life, 98–99, 101
Debord, Guy, 244n22
decay, xiii, 213n1; nuclear, 37, *195*, 196–97
decline, 19–20, 28–30, 52, 54, 119, 187
de-developmental arc, 91, *195*, 196
degeneration, queer, 108–9
dehumanization, 118, 246n37
Dekker, Carolyn, 92
Delany, Samuel, 226n112, 243nn14–15, 243nn18–29, 244n20, 244n23, 244n26, 249n77, 250n80; on being a Black gay man, 246n42; on contact, 141–145, 150, 153, 157–165, 185; on cruising, 35–36, 137–65, 202 , 204; on Debord, 244n22; on fallout, 184; grammar of, 19; on networking, 142, 144, 162, 245n29; on pleasantness, 187; Reid-Pharr on, 152, 249n70; on sexuality, 245n30
Demore, E. E., 63–64
Deseret News, 203
DeSilvey, Caitlin, 41, 43, 51, 191, 229n23, 231n50
desire, 9, 74, 78, 84, 91–94, 98, 107–8
Dey, Claudia, 1
diagnosis, terminal, 45–46, 66, 112
A Dialogue on Love (Sedgwick), 201
Dickey, William, 119–20
Dickinson, Emily, 46
diminishment, 149, 185–90, 193, 198, 253n44, 254n52
Dimock, Wai Chee, 199
disintegration, 28, 179, 196
dislocation, temporal, 175, 229n26
dissipation, 37, 95, 168, 170, 173–76, 196–97
distance, temporal, 23–24, 171, 186
Dixon, Melvin, 35, 107, 111, 114, 204, 241n74; on AIDS-related deaths, 14–15, 29; on etymology, 121–29. *See also specific works*
double cremation, 114–15, 253n48
Douglas (Wood), Ann, 52, 62
doulas, 98, 231n54; death, 34, 63–69, 98; HIV/AIDS, 34, 65–66, 231n55
Dunnet Landing (fictional town), 28, 43, 52–62, 134, 139, 202–4

ecocriticism, 223n68, 224n87; centripetal tendencies of, 170–71, 252n27; ecocritical reading and, xv, 4, 25, 169–70; queer, xv, 4, 8, 20, 24–26, 203–4
ecological, ecology and, 108, 145–52; ethics, 35–36, 136–37, 152; queer, 8–9, 13, 26, 140–45, 224n83
Edelman, Lee, 12–13, 109, 248n61

elderly people, 5, 26–27, 167–68, 203
Ellison, Ralph, 222n61
emotional power, 81, 118, 134
endangered species, endangerment and, 35, 36, 113–18, 122, 134, 236n6, 239n44
endings, the end and, 11, 39, 42, 45, 229n23; dead ends, 28, 108, 109; in *Pointed Firs*, 50, 60–61; of regionalism, 75; terminal present and, 33–34; of the world, 28, 113, 219n30
endlings, 29, 75, 108, 118
The End of Nature (McKibben), 33, 39
"end of the world," 28, 113, 219n30
environmental, 70, 128, 173, 248n56; activism, 6, 142, 154, 166, 172; care, xv, 137, 152, 164; crises, 7–8, 113–14, 245n33; disasters, 168–69, 182–83; ethics, 8, 142; humanities, 13, 35, 107, 238n23; precarity, 33–34; stewardship, 6–7, 33, 41, 63, 138, 146–47, 151–52, 161–62
environmentalism, 16, 119, 152–53, 205, 215n2, 239n45; chronological time in, 14; doubly futural mode of, 8, 27; futurity and, 3, 6–7, 216n7, 219nn30–31; goals of, 39; mainstream, 21, 39, 145–46, 205, 219nn30–31
erotics, eroticism and, 29, 174, 247n43, 248n65; affiliation, 5, 30; before AIDS, 185; anthro-decentric, 145–52; cruising and, 242n5, 245n30; non-reproductive, 10, 121; possibilities, 30, 70, 178, 226n105; queer, 204, 226n112, 245n28. *See also* sex, sexuality and
Eshun, Kodwo, 3
ethics, 5, 89, 178, 201; of deathcare, 63–69; ecological, 35–36, 136–37, 152; environmental, 8, 142; ethical relationality, 51, 60–61, 136, 150, 153, 160; queer, 11, 175, 188; of temporariness, 55–56; terminal, 42–43, 46, 48, 51–52
etymology, 32, 35, 51, 218n20, 241n74, 248n52; AIDS and, 107, 120; of contingency, 42–43; extinction, 118–30; of fallout, 175, 177
"Etymology: A Father's Gift" (Dixon), 121
Evans, Rebecca, 7–8
exceptionalism, 40, 45, 118, 201
extinction, 221n44, 222n60, 226n105, 236n8, 237n18, 241n60, 243n15; in the 1890s, 28–30; accidental, 77, 91, 93, 96, 103–6; AIDS and, 30, 35, 103–7, 109–10; collective, 104, 111–12; defined, 103; events, 5, 26–32, 105; futurity and, 105, 119; love and, 64; mass, 105, 236n2, 236n6; queer, xv–xvi, 5–6, 10–11, 105–18, 120, 123, 134–35, 163, 238n23, 240n50, 248n54; terminal, 111–12, 138–39, 205
extrapolation, 7–8, 25

fading, 5, 24, 27, 53, 74, 135, 144–45, 204
failures, failing and, 14, 40, 70–74, 79, 82, 173, 179
fallout, falling out and, 37, 84–85, 173–74, 205; aftermath of, 177–78; of AIDS, 181, 185; Delany on, 184; etymology of, 175, 177; grammatical, 169–70; of love, 177, 193, 197–202; nuclear and radioactive, 167–68, 175–76, 181–82, 191, 194–95; persistence and, 184–85, 190–91; politics of, 185–89; in *The Professor's House*, 37, 190–97, *195*; queer, 158–66, 170, 175–85, 191
families, 77–78, 100, 121–30; filial relationships and, 5, 28–30, 32, 226n105; normative familial structures, 49, 177; nuclear, 37, 76, 91, 168–69, 181, 191, *195*; parents in, 1, 99, 124
Fawaz, Ramzi, 20, 22–23, 25, 251n14
feminism, 44, 178, 186
Fetterley, Judith, 27–28, 225n90, 225n100

Fields, Annie, 28–29, 75
filial relationships, 5, 28–32, 226n105
Flight Ways (van Dooren), 105
Foote, Stephanie, 60
The Forbidden Territory of a Terrifying Woman (Lynch, Molly), 1
forgetting, the forgotten and, 58, 86–90, 171, 190, 245n31
formalism, 20–26, 172–73; queer, 5, 12, 72, 90, 174–75, 185–86, 254n62
"For My Own Protection" (Hemphill), 117
Foucault, Michel, 9, 28–29
"foundlings," 94–95, 129
Frank, Adam, 198–99
Freeman, Dorothy, 133
Freeman, Elizabeth, 14, 51, 185, 190–92, 233n18, 253n38; on belatedness, 186, 188–89; on possibility, 20, 23, 25–26
friendships: hermeneutic, 31; terminal, 33, 41–62, 64–65, 68, 145, 202; queer, 47–49, 62–63, 79
futurelessness, xiii–xiv, 102, 218n16, 229n21, 233n26, 250n5; AIDS and, 10, 183–84; cruising and, 35–36; of elderly people, 167–68; grammars impacted by, 5, 36–37, 170; in *The Professor's House*, 34; queer, 5–6, 9–12, 32, 186–87, 205, 220n42; regionalism and, 5, 27–28, 54–55, 204; terminal illness and, 39; in *TSRTSB* and, 138, 249n66
futures, futurity and, xv–xvi, 76, 216n5, 217n9, 217nn13–14, 220n43, 236n6; environmentalism and the, 2, 6–7, 216n7, 219nn30–31; extinction and, 105, 119; "future generations," 8, 14, 136, 229n21; future-orientation, 8–9, 47, 119, 186; liberatory, xvi, 217n9, 217n14, 219n30, 221n43, 243n19; non-reproductive, 176; as a noun, 12–13, 16, 18; persisting and, 2–3, 100–102, 224, 224n83; power of, 4–5; present and, 58–59; queer, 223n82, 250n5; in queer ecology, 20–21; queer theory and, 14; recession of, 1–3; reproductive, 12, 97, 125, 128–29; speculative, 3; sustainability and, 8

Gambone, Philip, 254n52
Garforth, Lisa, 8
gay men, 41–45, 87, 106, 110–18, 130–35, 203; AIDS-related deaths of, 29, 35, 67, 109, 114–16, 123, 141–45, 182, 185–87; as authors during the AIDS crisis, 32, 36, 203. *See also* cruising
"Geiger Counter" (Merrill), 182
generational narratives, 47–49
genocide, 122–23, 127, 167
genre, xvi, 2, 8, 22, 73, 170, 190, 240n47; regionalism as a, 26, 28, 43, 55
gentrification, 36, 154, 156, 243n18, 246n42, 248n62
gerunds, 4–5, 14
Ghosh, Amitav, 190
"The Gift of Death" (Brown), 110
global climate change, 7, 33, 39–40, 106, 119, 159
Goldberg, Jonathan, 96–97, 251n20
grammars, xvi, 205, 218n20, 224n83, 234n35, 252n31; of Cather, 72, 78–97, *195*, 196–97, 234n31, 235n48; of Delany, 19, 164; doulas and, 65–66; futurelessness and, 5, 36–37, 170; grammatical animacy, 12, 15–18; grammatical moods, 15, 17, 74, 90; grammatical tenses, 14–16, 18, 56, 71,

81–89, 96, 127–28; intransitive, 204; of Jewett, 19, 56, 59, 249n78; Latin, 104, 234n31, 234n34; of persistence, 11–20, 225n87; queer, 83–84, 92, 97, 180–81; temporality and, 13; of the unrealized, 32, 72, 92; verbal, 17–18, 205
Great Acceleration, 21
The Great Believers (Makkai), 112–13
The Great Derangement (Ghosh), 190
Grumbach, Doris, 78, 88, 98–99, 233n29
Grusin, Richard, 106, 239n46
Gulf War, 171

Halberstam, Jack, 74, 101
half-life, half-lives and, 167–70, 173–76, 183–84, 193, 252n21, 253n34
"Half Life" (Monette), 116, 182–84
"A Half-Life" (Cole), 182
"half way" and "mid-world" spaces, 38, 205
Halley, Janet, 24, 186–89
Halperin, David, 180, 252n31
halving, 183–84
Hamilton, Jennifer, 178–79, 192, 200
Hamilton College, 44
HAP. *See* Housing Authority of Portland
Haraway, Donna, 39–40, 71, 190
Harris, Cheryl, 18
Hart, James D., 99
Hartman, Saidiya, 168
"Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" (Luciano, Chen), 147–48
Hazard, Cleo Wölfle, 224n83
Hebert, Pato, 65
Heise, Ursula, 119–20, 133–34
Hemphill, Essex, 30, 35, 114, 117–18, 203
Herring, Scott, 79, 101, 180, 233n28
heteronormativity, 12, 90
heterosexuality, 76, 81, 94–95, 108, 180, 215n2, 223n28
The History of Sexuality (Foucault), 28–29
HIV/AIDS, 48, 182, 237n10, 239n44, 245n28, 250n80; crisis, 5, 10, 14–15, 33, 35, 106–18, 189, 203–4; doulas, 34, 65–66, 231n55; extinction and, 30, 35, 103–7, 109–10. *See also* AIDS
Hocquenghem, Guy, 108–9, 237n22
Hogan, Katie, 226n12
homonormativity, 157, 238n23
homophobia, 110, 220n42, 237n18, 238n23, 246n37, 252n21
homosexuality, 30, 79, 101, 107–10, 134–35, 224n83; homosexual-as-species, 5, 28–29, 108, 237n22; respectability and, 136–37
homosocial relationships, 79–80, 91, 99–100, 134, 180

Horwitz, Roger, 116, 181–84
hospice, 63–64, 66, 204
Housing Authority of Portland (HAP), xii, 213n2
human beings, 150, 236n7, 240n61
humanness, 81, 147–48, 246n37
Hurley, Jessica, 11, 220nn42–43, 221nn44–45, 233n26
Huston, Bo, 254n55

identity, 44, 226n101, 235n33, 245n29, 247nn46–48, 248n54; AIDS and, 115; American, 93; cruising and, 148–49; intergenerational, 95; personal, 151, 156, 249n39; Sedgwick on, 49–50; sexual, 30, 79, 179–81
"If Nancy Was" (Brainard), 25
"I'll Be Somewhere Listening for My Name" (Dixon), 15, 114
illegibility, 1, 30, 80–81, 101, 125, 171, 173
Illness as Metaphor (Sontag), 49
immortality, 229n21
imperative to save, 40–42, 50, 62–63
impossibility, 72, 74, 144–45, 241n60
"In Death Watch for a Stranger, Becoming a Friend to the End" (Kleinfield), 231n54
indifference, 6, 151, 171–72, 181, 197, 254n65
Indigenous, 91–92, 96, 222n61, 235n41, 235n44, 236n8; cosmologies, 16–17, 222n64; dispossession, 18; languages, 16–18
indirect causality, 169–70
individualism, possessive, 41, 50, 228n10
infinitive verbs, 34, 83–89, 234n35, 241n65
Infrastructures of Apocalypse (Hurley), 11, 220nn42–43, 221nn44–45, 233n26
inhumanisms, queer, 107, 147–148
institutional abandonment, 106–7, 113–14, 214n12, 220n42
intergenerationality, 42, 94–95, 121, 203
In the Shadow of the Epidemic (Odets), 112
In the Wake (Sharpe), 215
intransitive, 231n46; grammars, 204; verbs, 51, 53, 88, 139–40, 153, 163–65, 204
Invisible Man (Ellison), 222n61
Iovino, Serenella, 147

Jagose, Annamarie, 180
James, Henry, 28–30
Jewett, Sarah Orne, 4, 218n19, 226n112, 229n23, 230n39, 231n46, 244n24; Cather on, 75–76, 102; corpse watching and, 62–63; erotics of, 174; Fields and, 75; grammar of, 19, 249n78; indifference and, 197; regionalism of, 31–33; terminal regions of, 52–63. *See also specific works*
Johnson, E. Patrick, 253n47
Juhasz, Alexandra, 63, 67

Kaiser Shipbuilding Company, xiii

kelly, caffyn, 224n83
Khalip, Jacques, 132
Kimmerer, Robin Wall, 16–18, 222n62, 222n64
kinship, 52, 94, 107; queer modes of, 31–32, 35, 64, 104–5, 118–30
Klein, Melanie, 198
Kleinfield, N. R., 231n54
Kushner, Tony, 241n61

"last sight," death and, 134
"Last Time" (Dickey), 119–20
lateness, 1, 14, 21–22
Latin, 82–83, 104, 133, 145, 197, 234n31, 234n33
Lee, Rick H., 119
legibility, 31, 88, 174
Lindemann, Marilee, 99, 101
linearity, aftermaths and, 173–74
linear time, 14, 16–17, 84, 186
Listening to Images (Campt), 16
local color, 85, 194, 196, 225n92, 234n36
loneliness, 30, 41, 80, 113, 137
long 1890s, 5, 29, 30, 32, 33, 36, 104, 203–5
long 1980s, 5, 29, 30, 32, 33–36, 38, 67, 70, 71, 104, 106, 115, 120, 143, 177, 181, 203–5
longevity, 9, 40–41, 49, 138, 144, 153
longue durée, 28, 64, 112–13
"loosing," art of, 37, 47, 158, 170, 174, 202, 203
Lorde, Audre, 155, 248n65
Losing Earth (Rich), 34
"Losing Earth" (Rich), 70
Lothian, Alexis, 10
Lousley, Cheryl, 2, 7, 216n7
love, 45, 64–65, 80, 129–35, 180; falling out of, 177, 193, 197–202
Love, Heather, 13–14, 30–31, 74, 78, 234n37
Love Alone (Monette), 116, 134, 182–83, 188
Love's Instruments (Dixon), 121–22, 239n35
Lowe, Lisa, 16, 34, 72, 74, 90
Lucas, Julian, 156
Luciano, Dana, 107, 147–48, 154, 247n43, 248n62
lymphatic system, 142, 162, 250n80
Lynch, Michael, 44–47, 67–68, 129–30, 202, 241n71
Lynch, Molly, 1

Macharia, Keguro, 155–56, 158, 248n65

mainstream environmentalism, 21, 39, 145–46, 205, 219nn30–31
Malatino, Hil, 9
marriage, 27, 78, 80, 98, 129–30
Marvin's Room (film), 227
mass: death, 35, 109, 119, 133; extinction, 105, 236n2, 236n6
Maxwell, Lida, 133, 224n84, 241n61
Maynard, Robyn, 2
McCallum, E. L., 32
McKibben, Bill, 33, 39–40, 42, 50, 55, 229n18
McPherson, Guy, 64
meditation, 40
Merrill, James, 174, 182
Michaels, Walter Benn, 92–93
midwives, midwifing and, 66, 97–102
"mid-world" and "half way" spaces, 38, 205
Miller, Andrew H., 73–74, 80
"minor forms" of persistence, 11–15, 221n44
"Miss Tempy's Watchers" (Jewett), 62–63
modernism, 74, 93, 189
The Modernist Art of Queer Survival (Bateman), 107
Monette, Paul, 131, 134, 181–82, 188, 253n34; on AIDS deaths, 35, 112, 116. *See also specific works*
monogamy, 128, 142, 155, 248n62
monumentality, 4, 23, 55, 61
moods, grammatical, 15, 17, 74, 90
"more life," 120, 237n18, 241n61
Moreton-Robinson, Aileen, 18
Morris, Holly, 167
mortality, 40, 112, 203
Morton, Timothy, 26, 243n13
The Motion of Light in Water (Delany), 156
Muhammad, Abdul-Aliy A, 65
Muñoz, José Esteban, 215n2, 217nn9–10, 242n5; death of, 179; on queer utopia, 205
Musser, Amber Jamilla, 22, 25
My Ántonia (Cather), 82–83, 234n31, 244n25
Mycio, Mary, 176

nativism, 93
Nature Conservancy, 39
Nealon, Christopher, 31, 91, 93–94
Neimanis, Astrida, 178–79, 192, 200
Nelson, Maggie, 228n16

networking (Delany), 142, 144, 162, 245n29
nihilism, 6, 42, 71
Nixon, Rob, 26, 168, 174–75, 177–78, 187, 197; on slow violence, 159, 170–72
No Future (Edelman), 12, 248n61
nondoing, 49–51, 133
nondualism, 46, 249n73
non-fruition, 34, 58–59, 79
nonhuman turn, non-human species and, 117–18, 147, 150, 246n37
non-inevitability, 8, 73, 90, 92
non-reproductive, 64, 108, 176; eroticism, 10, 121
non-salvific model of care, 63
Noodin, Margaret, 236n8
normative, 27, 80–81; familial structures, 49, 177; life, 110, 119–20, 122, 193; vitality, xv, 46, 253n34
nostalgia, 23, 29–30, 53, 56–58, 60, 90, 92, 119
"Not this. More that!" (Macharia), 155
Not Under Forty (Cather), 75
nouns, 4–5, 22n61, 87, 177–78, 250n79; doula as a, 65–66; future-as-noun, 12–13, 16, 18; in Indigenous languages, 17; settler colonialism and, 18
"The Novel Démeublé" (Cather), 96
Novel Gazing (Sedgwick), 198
"Now We Think" (Hemphill), 30, 114
nuclear families, 37, 159, 168–69, 181, 191, *195*; colonialism and, 91; in *The Professor's House*, 76
nuclear weapons, nuclearity and, 9, 167–77, 181, 191, 250n5, 251n9, 251n17; decay, 37, *195*, 196–97
Nunokawa, Jeff, 109, 189

O'Brien, Susie, 2, 7, 216n7
obsolete, obsolescence and, 1, 19–21, 55, 125–26, 249n71; ontological crack and, 201; queer theory and, 24; in works by Barnett, 35
Odets, Walt, 112
Oh, Rebecca S., 11, 220nn42–43
"Old Mrs. Harris" (Cather), 26–27
"One By One" (Dixon), 29, 111–12, 204
On Freedom (Nelson), 228n16
ongoingness, 4, 139, 175, 181–82
"ontological crack between the living and the dead," 42–54, 59–60, 130, 204–5, 252n24
Opperman, Serpil, 147
Oregon, xiii, 213nn1–2
Our America (Michaels), 92–93
"Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now" (Whyte), 236n8

paranoid reading, 47, 163, 199, 228n16, 232n61

"Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" (Sedgwick), 47, 68, 163, 198–99, 228n16, 230n28, 232n61

parents, parenting and, 1, 99, 124

Parker, Andrew, 24, 186–89

"Party's Fall" (song), 178–79

passenger pigeons, 29, 112, 243n15

past: conditional, 16, 72–73, 84, 88, 96–97; persistence and, 126, 170, 190; present and the, 171, 190, 195–96; subjunctive, 34, 71; tense, 127–28

"Pedagogy of Buddhism" (Sedgwick), 49, 51, 132–33

Pérez, Roy, 22, 25

Perley, Bernard C., 236n8

permanence, 55, 215n16

perpetuity, 61, 83–84, 87

persisting, persistence and, 18–19, 41, 173, 233n30, 234n37, 241n65; being at the end and, 4; diminishment, 189, 196–97; dissipation and, 176; fallout and, 184–85, 190–91; futurity and, 2–3, 100–102, 224, 224n83; grammars of, 225n87; illegible, 102, 124–25, 169, 174, 177, 190, 194; of the infinitive, 89; kinship and, 190–97; "minor forms" of, 11–20, 221n44; and the past, 126, 170, 190; poetry and, 21; *Pointed Firs* on, 75; queer, 9–10, 18, 27, 53, 238n23; survival and, 91; terminal mode of, 53, 55–59; *TSRTSB* on, 139; unrealizing and, 95–98, 101–2

Phillips, Adam, 151

"Philostorgy, Now Obscure" (Barnett), 35, 110, 122–29, 191

pleasantness, 149–50, 155–56, 158, 161–65, 187, 248n65, 250n79

plotlessness, plotless texts and, 175, 189, 251n15

poetry, 21, 30, 35, 114–23

politics, 36, 68, 248n62

Poor Queer Studies (Brim), 213n5, 214n11

porn theaters, Times Square, 36, 137, 139, 148, 152, 157, 159

Portland State University (PSU), xiii–xv, 205, 213nn5–6, 214n12, 214n14

possessive individualism, 41, 50, 228n10

possessive, white, 18, 100, 228n10

potentiality, possibilities and, xvi, 11–12, 58–59, 89, 170, 245n30; erotic, 30, 70, 178, 226n105; fallout and, 177; non-reproductive, 64; political, 15–16, 20, 154; potential history and, 72–73, 84; representation and, 174; residuality and, 37; subjunctive, 70–76, 86; terminality and, 45–46; unrealized, 24–25, 34, 75–76

power, 3, 15, 40, 45, 240n50; emotional, 81, 118, 134; of the future, 4–5; of grammar, 18–19; of the unrealized, 97

precarity, xiii, 2, 33–34, 107, 214n14

prepositions, 51, 230n33, 231n46

present, 174; collective, 89, 168; future and the, 58–59; participles, 14; past and the, 171, 190, 195–96; present-tense, 56, 96; terminal, 4, 33–34, 41, 46, 51, 58, 63–69, 205

preservation, 27, 57

privatization, xiv, 143, 245n29

privilege, 102, 143; future related, 1, 3, 6–7; longevity and, 40, 61

The Professor's House (Cather), 234n31, 234n36, 241n69, 251n17, 254n55, 254n62; colonialism in, 90–97; death, 95, 192–93; de-developmental arc in, 91, *195*, 196; disintegration in, 179; extinction in, 103–5; "falling out" in, 37, 190–97, *195*; futurelessness in, 34; grammar of the unrealized in, 72, 76–97; midwifing in, 97–102; "Philostorgy, Now Obscure" and, 35, 123–24, 130; sexuality in, 180

promiscuity, 130–35, 137, 141, 151, 155, 174

property relations, 18, 84–86, 90–91, 192

propriety, 151–52, 243n14; proprietary logics, 18, 196, 243n14

Pryse, Marjorie, 27–28, 74–75, 225n90, 225n100

PSU. *See* Portland State University

public sex, 139–40, 142–44, 204

Purdy, Jedediah, 173

queer: affiliation, 32, 130; bonds, 170–85; death, 109–10, 224n83; ecocriticism, xv, 4, 8, 20, 24–26, 203–4; ecologies, 8–9, 13, 26, 140–45, 224n83; ethics, 11, 175, 188; existence, 9, 111–12; extinction, xv–xvi, 5–6, 10–11, 105–18, 120, 123, 134–35, 163, 238n23, 240n50, 248n54; formalism, 5, 12, 20–26, 72, 90, 174–75, 185–86, 254n62; friendships, 47–49, 62–63, 79; intergenerationality, 236n57, 238n23; kinship, 31–32, 35, 64, 104–5, 123, 127, 129–30; literary history, 32, 130, 226n112; parenting, 220n38, 237n18; reading, 10, 37, 43, 46–47, 174–75, 181; studies, 13, 20, 24, 213n5, 240n53; survival, 14, 35, 107–9, 224n83; temporality, 8, 11, 13–14, 24, 234n31; women's writing, 32, 36, 165

"Queer and Now" (Sedgwick), 23, 174, 181, 223n82

queer lasting, 4–6, 97–102, 205, 218n19, 221n45, 249n76; death and, 101–2; queer extinction and, xv–xvi, 10–11, 123; scales of, 189

queer literature. *See specific topics*

"Queer/Nature (Be Like Water)" (kelly), 224n83

queer theory, 26, 215n16, 224n87, 228n16, 251n20, 252n31; antisocial turn in, 12–13, 136, 151; concept of self-shattering, 8; "failures to become" in, 14; fallout in, 176–77; Freeman on, 188; history of, 23–25; hybridized, 109; paradigms of fallout and, 37; regionalism and, 30; as a theory of extinction, 10, 107

Queer Theory (Jagose), 180

Quiet Heroes (documentary), 204

race, 96–97, 213n1, 246n37, 246n42; racialization and, 114, 215n2, 252n21

radioactivity, 181–85, 191

realism, 3, 5–6, 73, 74, 218n22; apocalyptic, 11, 220n43

reciprocity, 17, 68, 121, 147

Redfield, Marc, 120, 124

redundancy, 104–7

referents, referentiality and, 19, 22, 87, 250n79

regionalism, American literary, 123, 177, 179, 205, 213n5, 225n90; AIDS literature and, 35, 104–5; backward mode of, 25; of Cather, 26–28, 31, 34–35, 74–90, 101–2; centrifugal decay of, 252n27; collectivity in, 27; death in, 30, 56, 59–62; futurelessness in, 5, 27–28, 54–55, 204; gender and, 226n112; of Jewett, 31–33; local color and, 225n92; as a "minor" literary mode, 26–27; plotlessness and, 251n15; queer female authors of, 203; terminality of, 28, 52–63. *See also specific writers*

Rehearsals for Living (Maynard, Simpson), 2
Reid-Pharr, Robert, 152, 249n70
relational logics, 55, 121
Remainders (Ronda), 21–23
remaining, 21–22, 25, 31, 229n18
"remnants," 39, 53, 55, 229n18
Rent (musical), 218n19, 254n51
reparative reading, 25–26, 37, 47–48, 57–58, 68, 228n16, 249n73; paranoid reading and, 163–64, 199
representation, 120, 169, 171–75, 190, 197
reproduction: biological, 108, 136; futurity and, 12, 97, 125, 128–29; reproductive logics, xv, 8–9, 12, 27, 35, 94, 97, 108–10, 125
residuality, 11, 21, 25, 169, 190, 240n50; extinction and, 120; possibility and, 37
Resilience (journal), 216n7
Resisting Regionalism (Campbell), 53
respectability, 136–37, 226n112
responsibility, 61, 144, 171
Reynolds, Guy, 179
Rich, Nathaniel, 34, 70
Ries, Kristen, 31–32, 37–38, 203–4
Rifkin, Mark, 217n11
Riggs, Marlon T., 115–16
Risk Society (Beck), 176
Rohy, Valerie, 32, 108, 238n23, 252n21
Ronda, Margaret, 21–22, 229n18
Rose, Deborah Bird, 111
Rossellini, Isabella, 20
Rotello, Gabriel, 141–42, 245n28

safe sex, 117–18, 185, 249n67
Saint-Amour, Paul, 189, 199
Sandilands, Catriona, 9, 223n77
Sarduy, Severo, 111
save, imperative to, 40–42, 50, 62–63
Schulman, Sarah, 113, 243n18
Scranton, Roy, 40–41, 50, 106, 228n7, 228n10, 237n10
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 205, 223n82, 229nn25–26, 249n71; on agency, 49–50, 88–89; art of "loosing," 37, 47, 158, 170, 174, 202, 203; on dying, 132–33, 187; "late" work by, 43–50, 229n19; "ontological crack" of, 42–52, 252n24; reparative reading by, 33, 47, 68, 163, 198–9, 228n16, 230n28, 232n61; on terminal illness, 14, 42–52, 174, 181, 201, 229n19, 229n24. *See also specific works*
Seitler, Dana, 25
"Seizing the Alterity of Futures" (Cornum), 217n9

self-: companioning, 50, 88, 99, 127, 241n69; possession, 88, 148, 152, 228n10; realization, xiv, 92, 95–96, 213n6; same, 14, 37, 127
seropositive writers, 29, 31–32, 35, 119, 127, 127n18, 177, 182. *See also* AIDS literature
settler colonialism, 3, 16–18, 90–97, 235n40, 236n8
sex: casual, 36, 138–39, 141–42; public, 139–40, 142–44, 204; safe, 117–18, 185, 249n67
sex, sexuality and, 73–74, 226n64, 226n105, 245n28, 245n30; Coviello on, 30–31, 74, 134–35, 179–80, 199; erotic life and, 29; heterosexuality, 76, 81, 94–95, 108, 180, 215n2, 223n28; Sedgwick on, 181; Sontag on, 114. *See also* homosexuality
sexual ecology, 141, 144, 164, 245n27
Seymour, Nicole, 8, 223n68, 248n6
shame, 64, 226n112
"Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" (Sedgwick, Frank), 198–99
shapeshifting, 17, 23, 175, 215n2
Sharpe, Christina, 215
Shotwell, Alexis, 155
Silent Spring (Carson), 173, 176
Simmel, Georg, 140
Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, 2
Sinha, Indra, 171
Sioux, Siouxsie, 178–79
slavery, transatlantic, 18, 168
slow violence, 159, 170–75, 187, 197, 224n83
Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (Nixon), 170–73
Smith, Martez, 66
Snyder, Maggie, 204, 255n2
"Sociability and Cruising" (Bersani), 36, 136, 140–41, 242n4
"The Sociology of Futurelessness" (Tutton), 216n5
Sontag, Susan, 49, 114, 131, 188, 237n10. *See also specific works*
spatiality, 41–42, 59, 176, 230n35
speculative imaginaries, 3, 5–8, 14–15, 25, 34, 217n13; speculation and, 218n22, 243n19
Spillers, Hortense, 18
spinsterliness, spinsters and, 97–102, 103, 139, 165, 226n112. *See also* elderly people
steadiness, 61, 67–69
Steingraber, Sandra, 245n33
"Still After" (Freeman), 185–86, 189–90
Stockton, Kathryn Bond, 14
Strange Natures (Seymour), 8
subjunctive, 15–16, 25–26, 82–83, 197, 234n31, 234n33; past, 34, 71; possibilities, 70–76, 86
suicide, 104
surrogate relations, 85–86, 196, 230n39
survival, 3, 9, 44–45, 91, 228n7, 238n23; Chernobyl, 167–68; queer, 14, 35, 107–9, 224n83
survivance, 92, 235n43

"Surviving the Sixth Extinction" (Baldwin, Noodin, Perley), 236n8
Szeman, Imre, 7

TallBear, Kim, 222n64
Teare, Brian, 223n82
temporal: dislocation, 175, 229n26; distance, 23–24, 171, 186
temporality, 36, 222n61, 240n47, 250n5; AIDS and, 111, 115–17, 119; dilated, 204; doulas reimagining, 66; grammar, 13; paradigms of, 6, 32, 186; queer, 8, 11, 13–14, 24, 234n31; settler, 16; slow violence and, 159, 170–75, 187, 197, 224n83; temporal drag, 14, 233n18; terminal illnesses and, 41–42, 44–48
tenses, grammatical, 14–16, 18, 56, 71, 81–89, 96, 127–28
terminal, terminality and, 5, 221n4, 229n24, 230n27; care, 51–52, 64–69, 158, 187–89, 231n46; collective, 49, 61, 64–65; community, 53, 63; diagnosis, 45–46, 66, 112; ethics, 42–43, 46, 48, 51–52; extinction and, 111–12, 138–39, 205; friendship, 33, 41–62, 64–65, 68, 145, 202; illnesses, 14, 39–52, 119–20, 174; present, 4, 33–34, 41, 46, 51, 58, 63–69, 205; of regionalism, 28, 52–63; regions, 6–7, 43–63
Thomas, Kate, 14, 221n55
Thoreau, Henry David, 6
Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (Delany) (*TSRTSB*), 31, 226n112, 243n19, 244n20, 244n24, 245nn28–29; cruising in, 35–36, 137–65, 202 , 204; fallout in, 184–85; futurelessness and, 138, 249n66; Times Square Redevelopment Project, 156–57, 164
Tomkins, Silvan, 201
Tomorrow's Parties (Coviello), 28, 179, 247n47
Tongues Untied (documentary), 115
too-lateness, 42–43, 187, 201
Touching Feeling (Sedgwick), 47, 198, 230
transatlantic slavery, 18, 168
transitive verbs, 6, 12, 13, 51, 53, 79, 88, *195*, 196, 220n43, 221n54
trauma, 48, 192–93, 249n67
Treichler, Paula, 110–11
Tsing, Anna, 168
TSRTSB. *See Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*
Tuhkanen, Mikko, 32
Tutton, Richard, 216n5
Twitter, 1–2

unbecoming, forms of, 41, 101
unbelonging, feeling of, 14
Underflows (Hazard), 224n83
The Uninhabitable Earth (Wallace-Wells), 106
United States, 39, 52, 110; AIDS crisis in, 10, 14–15, 33, 35, 106–20, 154–55, 164, 189, 203–4
unlived life, 35, 72, 74, 124, 127–29
unliving, queer, 107, 118–30

unrealized, 76–97, 233nn29–30, 235n44; grammar of the, 32, 72, 92; persistent presence of the, 95–98, 101–2; possibilities, 24–25, 34, 75–76
untimeliness, 13–14, 170, 174
“Uses of the Erotic” (Lorde), 155, 248n65

van Dooren, Thom, 105, 118, 132–34, 226n105, 238n23, 243n15
Vanport (military public housing project), Oregon, xiii–xv, 213nn1–2
Vanport Extension Center (Vanport College), xiii–xv
verbal, 177–78, 222n64; grammars, 17–18, 205
verbs, 52, 62, 96, 164, 230n33; conjugated, 84, 96, 145, 241n65; doula as a, 65–67; infinitive, 34, 83–89, 234n35, 241n65; intransitive, 51, 53, 88, 139–40, 153, 163–65, 204; “to love,” 80–81, 84–85, 151; transitive, 6, 12, 13, 51, 53, 79, 88, *195*, 196, 220n43, 221n54
“The Very Same” (Monette), 182
violence, 106–7; colonial, 90; institutionalized, 64; slow, 159, 170–75, 187, 197, 224n83; of white supremacy, 18
Vizenor, Gerald, 235n43

waiting rooms, AIDS, 38, 203–4
Wallace-Wells, David, 7, 133–34, 236n6
Warner, Michael, 20, 23–24
Watney, Simon, 110
“The Way We Live Now” (Sontag), 114, 131–34, 188, 200, 237n10
Weiner, Joshua, 175, 226n101
What Would an HIV Doula Do? collective, 65–66
“White Glasses” (Sedgwick), 44–46, 67, 129–30, 229n24, 239n37, 241n71
Whitehead, Joshua, 17–18
whiteness, 18, 90, 95, 97, 117, 215n2, 240n53
“white possessive,” 18, 100, 228n10
white supremacy, 18, 252n21
Whyte, Kyle Powys, 222n62, 236n8
Wilde, Oscar, 28, 73–74
Wilde trials, 28–29, 226n105
Wilson, E. O., 113
Women Take Care (Hogan), 226n12
worldmaking, 5–6, 9–11, 67–68, 220n38
Wormwood Forest (Mycio), 176
Woubshet, Dagmawi, 111, 119, 240n53

Yeats, W. B., 194, 254n55
Young, Damon, 175, 226n101
Yusoff, Kathryn, 8–9

Zibrak, Arielle, 1–2, 4

About the Author

Sarah Ensor is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to American Literature and the Environment*.